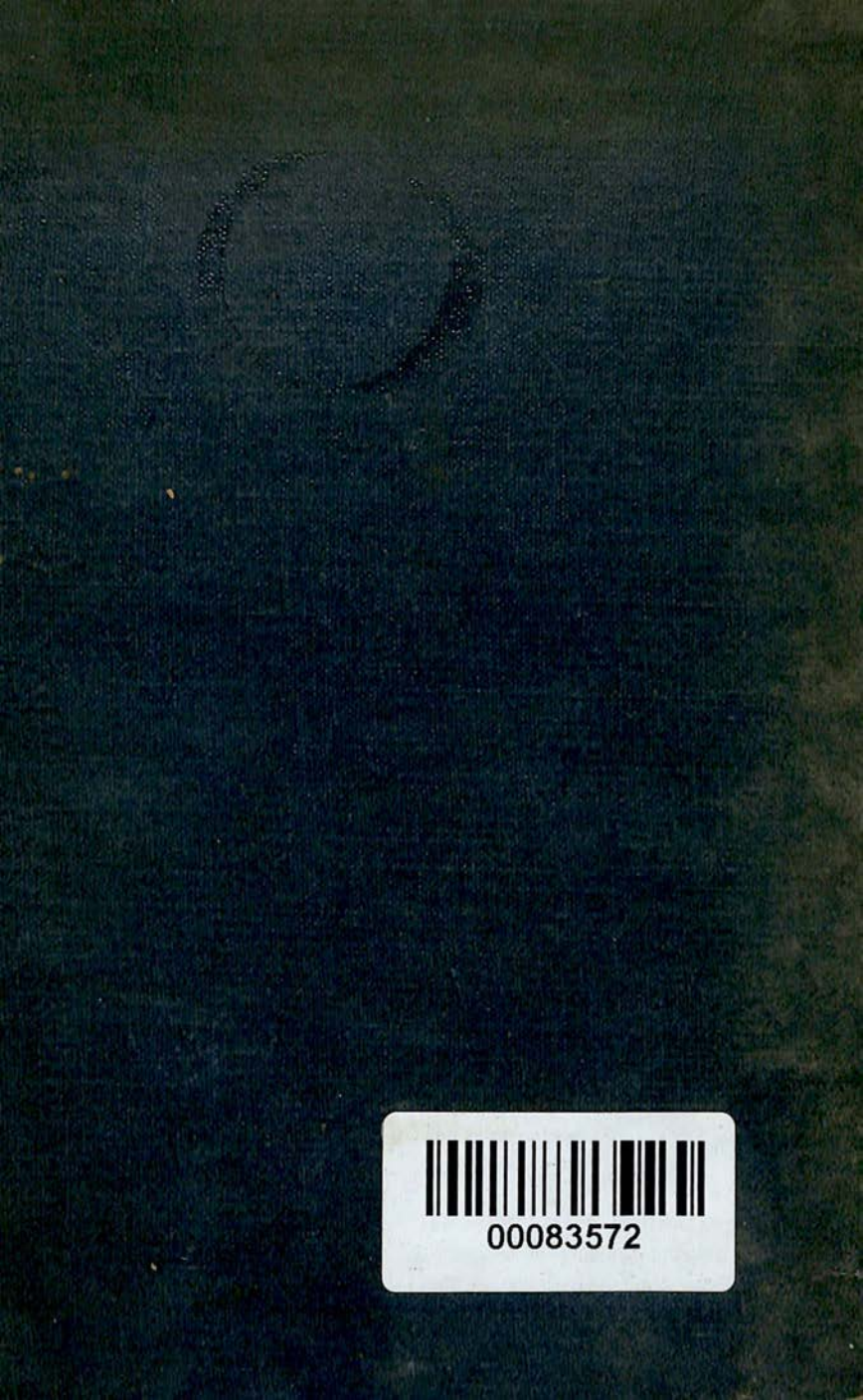
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THE GREAT FUR LAND

OR

SKETCHES OF LIFE

IN THE

HUDSON'S BAY TERRITORY

BY

H. M. ROBINSON

83572

WITH NUMEROUS ILLUSTRATIONS FROM DESIGNS BY CHARLES GASCHE

LONDON
SAMPSON LOW, MARSTON, SEARLE & CO.
188 FLEET STREET
1879

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PREFACE.

IN the preparation of this volume the aim of the author has been to present some of the more picturesque phases of life in the Hudson's Bay Territory, without wearying the reader with the personal business of the traveler. To this end he has shaped his material in the form of sketches, connected only by their order, which represents the seasons of the year in which the features treated periodically recur.

Wherever the personal knowledge of the author has been at fault, the following works of other travelers have formed the basis of his descriptions: Hargrave's *Red River*, Butler's *Great Lone Land* and *Wild North Land*, Ballantyne's *Hudson Bay*, Southesk's *Saskatchewan and the Rocky Mountains*, and Milton and Cheadle's *Northwest Passage by Land*. Much of the material used in the composition of the volume has appeared heretofore in the shape of contributions to *Appleton's Journal*, *Harper's* and *Lippincott's Magazines*, and the *New York Evening Post*.

H. M. R.

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THE GREAT FUR LAND.

CHAPTER I.

A JOURNEY BY DOG-SLEDGE.

A MEMORY which refuses to associate with ordinary remembrances, and has an odd preference for the company of sportive and incongruous dreams, is that of a certain charming gentleman, of extremely punctilious bearing, careering wildly over a frozen Northern prairie in a dog-sledge. He was the proprietor and determined wearer of the only silk hat within a radius of four hundred miles, and still adhered to the use of a shawl as an outer covering long years after it had ceased to be employed as an article of wear. Added to this was an irreproachable suit of black broadcloth, the like of which was not to be encountered within the same radius, and a pair of tight boots, that would have frozen the feet of a half-breed runner. In this civilized apparel he was essaying his first ride in a dog-sledge, and a more incongruous spectacle it has never been my lot to behold.

Seated in a cariole resembling in shape a heelless shoe, the unfortunate gentleman was whirling over the drifted plain in rapid but tortuous course. Having, in the confidence of perfect ignorance, refused the proffered services of a driver

lest he should excite ridicule by being guarded and guided like an infant in a baby-cab, he was now reaping the fruits of his rashness in a series of the most remarkable gyrations of which the human body is capable. The dogs being unacquainted with the language of their freight, and evidently animated by the spirit of evil, wandered at their own sweet will over the snow-covered plain; their will generally prompting them to plunge headlong into every drift, or to skirt the steep sides of the long ridges. Under these depressing circumstances, it behooved the neophyte to use his utmost endeavor to retain an upright position, in order to avoid a sledge-ride in which his own body would be used as the runners, and the cariole assume the place of passenger.

Being limited by the construction of the sledge to the use of his hands alone, hitherto employed in holding his shawl, he was forced to drop that favorite covering in order that, by swaying rapidly from side to side and plunging his hands in the snow, he might right the sledge. This continuous seesaw, and the crowning incongruity of the silk hat, gave him at length the appearance of a jumping-jack, or "the gentleman in black," as he starts suddenly from the box and swings pendulous from side to side. His frantic shouts of "Whoa!" availed nothing; the dogs, having been sent out to give their passenger a ride, were evidently bent upon doing it, and wandered vaguely about on the drifting snow. At length, a more than usually vertical drift being reached, the tired arms gave out, and the cariole, left without support, poised a moment in mid-air, then turned over, leaving the recumbent voyager with his legs still fastened to the sledge, but with arms thrust deep into the snow and head calmly pillowed in

the depths of his hat. From this position he was powerless to move, except at the will of the dogs, who had now faced about in their harness, and seated themselves to gaze imperturbably upon the wreck. The spectacle of this representative of a higher civilization lying stranded upon a thin board in a limitless ocean of snow, proved too much for half-breed courtesy; and there he lay until the owner of the cariole had sufficiently recovered from successive convulsions of laughter to run to his assistance.

A determination to avoid a like experience led the writer, some time afterward, before undertaking a winter's journey across the frozen expanse of Lake Winnipeg, to pursue a little judicious training, surreptitiously undergone upon an unfrequented by-road, before even attempting to decide upon the merits of the various teams presented for that service.

To begin my journey, I purchased a board about nine feet long and sixteen inches wide, which was duly steamed and turned up at one end. To it wooden bows were fastened, while over it was stretched a stout covering of raw-hide. This accomplished, the board resembled the front of a slipper. To complete the likeness, a heel-top was made by attaching an upright back about two feet from the rear end, and extending the raw-hide covering to it. Then the shoe was submitted to an Indian friend, who decorated its outer surface with mystical emblems in red and yellow pigments, covering the whole with a coating of oil. When the motive power was furnished, the ship would be ready to sail.

The selection of the propelling force was more difficult of accomplishment. Dogs of high and low degree were brought for inspection; for dogs in the North have but one occupa-

tion—to haul. From the Esquimaux down through all the stages of canine life to the Indian mongrel, all are alike doomed to labor before a sledge of some kind during the winter months; all are destined to howl under the beatings of a brutal driver; to tug wildly at the moose-skin collar; to haul until they can haul no longer, and then to die. When I look back at the long line of seared and whip-marked heads, whose owners were put through their best paces in demonstration of their perfect fitness for the work, what a host of sadly-resigned faces rises up before me! There were heads lacking an ear, an eye; heads bearing the marks of blows with sticks, whips, the heels of boots; heads that had been held down and beaten out of all semblance of life; and heads yet all bleeding and torn with the brutal lashings thought necessary to impart an air of liveliness before a probable purchaser! The same retrospect brings up the hybrid drivers of those dogs, upon the majority of whose countenances a painful indifference to suffering and an inherent brutality were plainly visible—dusky, athletic fellows, whose only method of dealing with the poor dog, who gave up everything in life for them, was by blows and fierce invective.

For a time all teams submitted for inspection seemed wanting in some essential quality. At length, however, my prospective driver informed me of a half-breed acquaintance who was the possessor of a team which he thought would answer the purpose. His mongrel friend resided sixty miles away; but distance and time go for naught in the North—in fact, are about the only possessions with which the inhabitants are plentifully endowed; so we compassed the space and purchased the dogs. There were four of them—long-haired,

clean-legged, fox-headed animals, with more the appearance of wolves than of dogs. With them came four sets of har-

ONE OF THE TEAM.

ness, each set having a tinkling row of bells in its back-band which, being of different tones, rang a merry chime as their wearers trotted briskly along. This completed the passenger accommodation; now for the baggage-van.

Another board, ten feet in length and fourteen inches wide, was purchased, steamed, and turned up at one end. But, instead of the raw-hide covering, shoe-latchets were inserted in the outer edges of the board, which would tie down tightly to its surface the load of provision, bedding, and camp-equipage, necessary for the journey. For this sledge the motive power was selected less critically; strength was the requisite, not symmetry; so dogs of strong sinew and large bone were chosen, regardless of looks. For provision, we had pemmican—the pounded dried meat of the buffalo mingled with fat—and black tea; the dogs had frozen whitefish.

My driver was a heathen Cree. He was, moreover, a linguist, speaking several aboriginal dialects and a kind of mongrel French. Five golden sovereigns constituted the bond of union between us. He was a lank, muscular man, the bones of whose huge frame stood out conspicuously at the joints and angles, and the muscles showed distinctly in his gaunt meagreness. He had yellow paint on his face, and was arrayed in rather bewildering apparel. His headgear was the luxuriant *chevelure* with which Nature had endowed him. On his feet he wore moccasins; on his limbs he wore leggins, which extended only a certain way above the knee, leaving that Providence which "tempers the wind to the shorn lamb" a dreary waste of yellow-mottled skin upon which to experiment; on his body he wore a cotton shirt perennially innocent of soap. Attached to this shirt, and stretched straight and taut across the pit of his stomach, he wore a brass watch-chain. Over all, like the mantle of Charity, was strapped a green blanket. Thus attired, he resembled a settled melancholy, or a god of bile from a dyspeptic's *inferno*. Nevertheless, he could travel from forty to sixty miles a day, running alongside the sledge.

It was the 10th of December when we left Fort Garry, bound down the Red River of the North, across the frozen length of Lake Winnipeg, to Norway House, at its northern extremity. There started with us the four dog-trains and two drivers which constitute the Great Northern Packet of the Hudson's Bay Company, and which, with its connecting links, scatters news over all that vast region lying between the forty-ninth and sixty-seventh parallels of latitude, in North

America, and reaching east and west from Labrador to Alaska. Our route being the same, we joined company with the hybrid Mercuries, and began our journey amid much cracking of whips, howling of dogs, and profanity discreetly veiled by delivery in the heathen tongues.

To the novice the spectacle presented by a number of gayly-accoutered dog-trains gliding merrily by is a cheerful one. The tiny bells keeping time to the foot-falls of the shaggy train; the cariole fantastically decorated in bright, warm colors; the passenger cozily wrapped in furs and woolens of shades suggestive of warmth and comfort; the active driver trotting unweariedly alongside, until the sledge with all its belongings becomes a mere speck of black upon the limitless expanse of snow—all conspire to commend dog-sledging to the transient spectator as the ideal of winter travel, the veritable poetry of motion. The swan-like motion of the sledge as its thin bottom yields in graceful curves and undulations, to adapt itself to inequalities of surface beneath it, is strangely suggestive of the progress of a canoe over waters faintly ruffled by a passing breeze. To lie in such a cradle, and be gently rocked over a varying landscape hour after hour, would seem an idyllic life in which satiety could never come. But, suppose the cold to be of that intensity which it is neither possible to picture nor describe; of that degree in which, after having spoken of the whip-handle which burns the hand that touches it, the tea that freezes while it is being drunk; in which an instant's exposure of the face leaves the cheek or the classical nose upon which one prides himself white and rigid as a piece of marble; in which the traveler, with head bowed to meet the crushing blast, goes wearily on,

as silent as the river and forests through which he rides, and from whose rigid bosom no sound ever comes, no ripple ever breaks, no bird, no beast, no human face appears—a cold of which, having said all this, there is a sense of utter inability to convey any adequate idea, except that it means sure and certain death, with calm and peaceful face turned up to the sky, and form hard and unimpressible as if carved from granite, within a period whose duration would expire in the few hours of a winter's daylight if there were no fire or means of making it upon the track.

Suppose, too, that the gently-undulating motion of the sledge, in accommodating itself to the inequalities of the frozen surface, which seemed so suggestive of a canoe floating cork-like upon rippling water, felt, now that one is seated in the sledge, like being dragged over a gravel-walk upon a sheet; or that the track has been completely snowed up, and the wretched dogs are unequal to the emergency. Mistatim, the leader, is willing, but young, thin, and weak; the middle one, Shoathinga, is aged and asthmatic; and the shafter, Kuskitaostiquarn, lame and lethargic. From morning till night the air resounds with howling and the cries of their drivers anathematizing Shoathinga and Kuskitaostiquarn. The sledges constantly upset from running against a stump or slipping over a hillside; and, when one hauls and strains to right them, the dogs lie quietly down, looking round at him, and not offering to pull an ounce to help. When the driver, aggravated beyond endurance, rushes up, stick in hand, and bent on punishment, they make frantic exertions, which only render matters worse, resuming their quiescent attitude the moment he returns again to haul at the sleigh; and all this time, per-

THE LINE OF MARCH.

haps, the unfortunate passenger lies, bound and helpless, half buried in the snow. Under these conditions the scene changes, and the envious spectator of the poetry of motion retires with more sympathy for those old *voyageurs* of the fur-trade, who used to pay stipulated sums to the happy inventors of new and strange oaths.

The fall of snow on land being insufficient for sledding purposes, we followed the frozen channel of the river as a track, the six trains gliding smoothly over the first stage of their journey. Harnessed in tandem fashion, one after another, the twenty-four dogs and accompanying sledges formed a long line, and presented a gallant spectacle. Fresh from a long rest, they trotted gayly along, affording their drivers but little pretext for blows or imprecation in the breath-taking pace they attained. True, the gaunt Cree dealt Whiskey a merciless flick, from time to time, and urged upon Brandy the necessity of minding his eye; but I fancy it was owing more to a desire to keep his hand in play, and his vocabulary of invective in memory, than from any defect in their work. Nevertheless, such casual and indifferently-bestowed abuse revealed the fact that, of the eight animals who were doing their best individually and collectively, to haul me and my baggage over that waste of ice, five rejoiced in the names of Brandy and Whiskey, while the remaining three distributed Coffee and Chocolate between them. This knowledge was a blow under which I reeled. An apostle of temperance sweeping past lonely dwellings, and dashing with a wild scurry through Indian camps, shrieking for strong drink, and followed by a wild retainer opposing his demands with suggestions of coffee and chocolate, would likely convey to the startled

dwellers on the plain the idea of a migratory delirium tremens, or a peripatetic advertisement of "The Bar-tender's Own Book." Upon inquiry, however, my misery was found to have abundant company; for, of the sixteen dogs attached to the packet-trains, no fewer than eleven reveled in an alcoholic nomenclature. The reason assigned by the drivers for so general use of spirituous appellations was, that the mere sound of these names was suggestive of warmth, comfort, and good cheer; from which the wearied driver doubtless derived a satisfaction equal to washing

> "....his hands with invisible soap,
> In imperceptible water."

Still, upon second thought, it may be held that, as certain colors are suggestive of warmth and comfort—a stove painted red about the base ofttimes deludes the casual visitor with the idea of heat—so may the influence of certain names be productive of like genial effect upon the imagination. However it may be, I know that if such nomenclature be adopted without well-founded reason on the part of the dog-driver, it is the only thing in the many curious phases of his life that is so accepted. Not a thread in the web of his existence but has its use.

Twenty miles below our point of departure, and perched upon the lofty and precipitous bluffs of the river, we caught sight of one of those impossible pictures of mediæval fortification which so often adorn the lids of snuff-boxes, or the pages of ancient albums. There were the same peaked roofs and turrets, the same bleak view of unadorned stone-wall, with bastions, ramparts, gates, and all, as in the original. But no

plumed knight or trusty squire issued from its portals, nor double-handed sword or glittering armor decked its halls. It was the abode of Dives, and Dives trades in beads and gilt, in furs and tobacco, in cattle and calico. As a company's* trading-post it proved a somewhat extensive collection of residences, shops, and stores. These were all inclosed within a stone-wall, pierced throughout its entire circuit with loop-holes, so arranged as to suggest the inquiry whether, in the extremely improbable event of the place being besieged, they would present greater facilities to the defenders of the establishment, or to the assailants in firing through them at the garrison within.

The banks hereabouts were high and densely wooded. Some miles below, however, the woods disappeared, and the banks, which gradually sank to a lower level, were covered with long, reedy grass. Indian tents, surrounded even at that late season by nets hung up to dry, indicated the pursuits of their owners. The stream, after reaching the low country, split into numerous channels, through several of which its waters found their way into Lake Winnipeg.

At the outlet of the main channel our sledges were run ashore. The bank here was a long strip of shingle running out into the lake, the frozen waters of which extended northward out of sight. We had accomplished over forty miles; the night was closing in, and this was the last available camping-place before setting out upon the long stretches from islet to islet, or point to point, of the lake's shore. So the drivers loosed their dogs, and proceeded to gather drift-wood for the

* The Company referred to here, and elsewhere throughout the book where the word occurs, is invariably the Hon. Hudson's Bay Company.

night. The twenty-four dogs, meanwhile, surveyed each other grimly, discovered points of etiquette upon which they could not agree, and fell into a general fight, threatening disastrous consequences until the loaded whip-stocks of the men separated them.

The snow having been cleared away by the aid of a snow-shoe used as a shovel, and our own supper prepared and eaten, we turned our attention to the dogs who had borne the burden if not the heat of the day; for the sledge-dog's day is one long tissue of trial. Put to a task from which his whole nature revolts, he is driven to the violation of every instinct by the continual lashings of a driver's whip. Before Night has lifted her sable mantle to shroud the stars, the sledge-dog has his slumbers rudely broken by the summons of his master. Close by the camp, under the protecting lee of stump or fallen tree, he has lain coiled in the roundest of balls during the night. Perhaps, if his lines are cast in pleasant places, he has encroached upon his driver's blanket, and contributed his vital heat to the comfort of that merciless functionary. Perhaps, too, the fast-falling flakes of the snow-storm have covered him in their soft folds, adding to his sense of warmth, and revealing his presence only in the shape of a rounded hillock of snow. He may, perchance, dream the dreams of peace and comfort, or imagine that his soft covering will render him undistinguishable from the surrounding mass of white; to be awakened from his delusion by blow of whip-stock, a kick of the driver's foot, and the stern command to find his place in the gaudy gear of moose-skin and bells awaiting him—an ornamented and bedizened harness that mocks the pathos of his whip-marked face and trembling figure. Then comes the

start. The wooded copse is left behind, and under the incipient dawn he plods along through the snow. The sleepy driver seeks to dissipate the morning cold by rapid motion, and mercilessly urges the dog to his utmost effort. The crisp air resounds with the crack of his whip and the echoes of his dire imprecation. The dog, not yet nerved to his uncongenial labor, cunningly takes every advantage to shirk, refusing to pull when it is most required, and showing wonderful speed and alacrity, rushing off with the heavy sledge when the distracted driver comes near to punish.

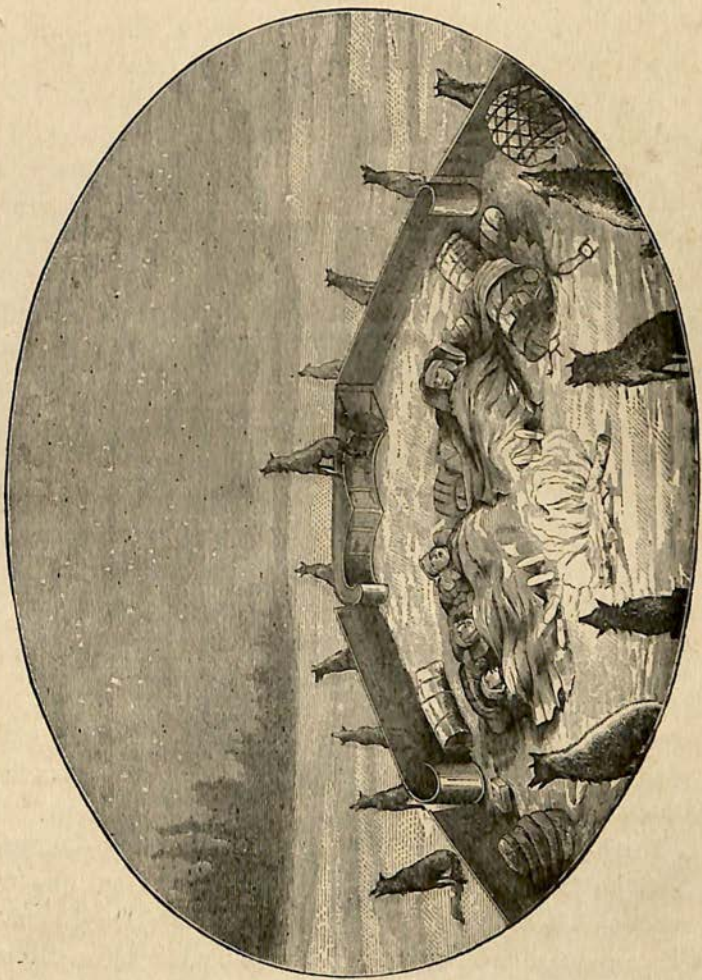
The day dawns, sun rises, morning merges into mid-day, and it is time to halt for a dinner in which the hauling-dog cannot share; then on again in Indian file, as before. If there be no path in the snow, the driver travels before to beat one with his snow-shoes, and the "foregoer," or leading-dog, follows close behind. But if there be a track, however faint, the animal follows it himself; and when lost to sight by wrack and drift of tempest, his sense of smell enables him to keep it straight. Thus through the short hours of the winter's day they travel on, in withered woods through which the wind howls and shrieks, or on the endless expanse of snow, the glare of whose unsullied whiteness blinds the vision of the lake-traveler; through solitudes which, save when the occasional dog-sledge with its peals of bells in winter, or the swiftly-passing boat-brigade resonant with the songs of the summer *voyageurs*, intrudes, with its momentary variation, upon the shriek of the all-penetrating wind, the ripple of the stream, the roar of the thunder-toned waterfall, or the howl of the wild beast of the woods, are abandoned to the undisturbed possession of the Indian hunter and his prey.

When the winter's day draws to a close, and the twilight landscape has warned the traveler to choose his resting-place for the night, the sledge-dog finds relief from his harness, and his day's work is at an end. His battered and disfigured face loses in some slight degree its rueful look, to assume an air of expectation. He stretches and rolls in the powdery snow, then lies down to watch the preparation of the evening meal, in faint hope that some meagre portion may slip from his master's hand, or be left a moment unguarded. Soon, however, his watch merges into unconsciousness, and he sleeps. But the termination of his master's meal, followed by the sound of the axe striking the block of pemmican, or the unloading of the frozen white-fish from the provision-sledge, at once wakens him to life and vigor. He leaps quickly up, an alert, vicious animal, with every instinct centred in an eager craving for food. In the plain-country a daily ration of two pounds of pemmican is thrown him; in the region of forest and stream, where fish forms the staple food, he receives two large white-fish raw. In his diet he prefers fish to meat, and betrays its superiority in his work. His one daily meal is soon despatched; no pleasures of deglutition are his. A quick snap, followed by a moment's rapid munching, and the pemmican has disappeared; the same short snap, a few convulsive throes, and the frozen fish is bolted almost whole, and the wistful eyes turned up for more. Not finding it, he indulges in a season of growling and snapping at his fellows, then lies down out in the snow to sleep, or, perchance, to dream of that day, which never comes for him, when the whip shall be broken and hauling shall be no more. Thus he remains till morn, unless some old shafter, grim and grey, rising

at midnight on his haunches, inaugurates a chorus to the skies; or a pack of wolves, seated like sentries in a huge circle about the camp, challenge him by quick barks to renew their hereditary feud.

The preparations for repose were of the simplest description. As the wind swept down the lake from the north, our heads were placed in that quarter, with feet in dangerous proximity to the fire. On the summit of the heap of snow formed in digging out our camping-ground were placed, as a protection against the fierce blasts, the inverted dog-sledges, which assumed amid that dreary landscape the likeness of head-stones, marking our resting-place with a rude "Hic jacet." Descending into bed from the surface of the snow, and muffled in unlimited bedding, the sensation given by the surrounding banks and overhanging sledges was that of sleeping in a gigantic four-poster with a highly-decorated headboard. The three drivers lay close together, but for certain sanitary reasons their freight chose to form a single spoke in the wheel, and reclined at an angle of his own.

Sleep comes soon to the traveler in arctic winters; but a beautiful dream of a little maiden who was wont to disport upon my knees was rudely broken by a visible perception of peril—a consciousness of the hovering presence of evil. How to describe these feelings I know not; but as, if the eyes of a watcher are steadily fixed upon the countenance of a sleeper for a certain length of time, the slumberer will certainly start up, wakened by the mysterious magnetism of a recondite principle of clairvoyance, so it was that, with closed eyes and drowsed-up senses, an inward ability was conferred upon me to detect the presence of danger near me—to see, though



THE NIGHT CAMP.

sleep-blind, the formless shape of a mysterious horror crouching beside me. And, as if the peril that was my night-mate was of a nature to be quickened into fatal activity by any motion on my part, I felt in my very stupor the critical necessity of lying quite still; so that, when I at last awoke and felt that, as I lay with my face to the sky, there was a thick, heavy, shivering thing upon my chest, I stirred not, nor uttered a word of panic. Danger and fear may occasionally dull the sense and paralyze the faculties, but they more frequently sharpen both; and when I say that the whole of my chest and even the pit of my stomach were covered with the heavy proportions of the thing, its considerable size will be acknowledged. A cold sweat burst from every pore. I could hear the beating of my heart, and I felt, to my increased dismay, that the palsy of terror had begun to agitate my limbs. "It will wake," thought I, "and then all is over!"

At this juncture there sounded above my head a prolonged howl, caught up and reiterated in varying chorus by a circle of hoarse voices surrounding our couch. And upon this the thing rose up on my chest with a quick start, and joined the dismal refrain with a barytone of remarkable power; while the voice of my protecting Cree rang out in sudden anger: "Whiskey, marche! Sacre chien, passe partout!" and the warmth-seeking Whiskey shrank quickly from his living pedestal to join his brethren of the mystic circle on the snow above. Thus relieved from the weight of the sledge-dog, who had presumed upon a gentler nature to increase his own comfort, I peered cautiously up and beheld a scene the most grotesque.

Seated upon the highest inverted sledge, with a look of utter dejection and overpowering anguish of soul, sat the aged leader of a packet-train, lifting up his voice in a series of heart-rending howls in deep bass. Seated in a like manner at regular intervals about him, and forming a huge circle inclosing the camp, were the remaining twenty-three dogs, taking their cue from the leader, and joining the chorus in dismal tenor and rasping soprano. The weird melancholy of that howling brought a sense of utter loneliness and desolation. The echoes reverberated over the lake, and died away in mournful, wailing cadences on the night-wind. The isolation seemed to deepen, and become palpable. Above, the sky was spangled with such myriads of stars as are only seen in northern latitudes; around lay a dreary waste of greyish white, empty, desolate, and void of life; no sound save the dismal howling of the dogs. Soon, however, there was intermingled with it much heathen profanity and objurgation, delivered in various tongues. The chorus had awakened the drivers, who were endeavoring to quiet the dogs by imprecations, in order to avoid the necessity of rising and using the whip. "Brandy! Brandy! sacre démon!" "Coffee! ye ould sinner, pren' garde!" "Chocolat, crapaud that ye aire, Chocolat!" "Whiskey! ah, sal-au-prix!" "Whiskey!" "Ah, Coffee! you will catch it presently!" "Capitaine! Mistatim!" "Brandy! 'cre démon!" Then followed an outburst of profanity, and a hasty, furious shout to the whole circle, resembling a call for mixed drinks which has had no equal since the "opening" of the first bar on the Pacific slope. All this, however, proved of no avail, and the distracted drivers were finally forced to leave their warm beds and grasp their

whips, upon which the wretched animals darted off in agonies of fear.

Three hours before dawn we arose and prepared for departure by eating a fat breakfast and swallowing a great many cups of tea. Then my uncivilized driver of dogs, who joined the second-sight of a weather-seer to his other accomplishments, took an inventory of the weather, and predicted a storm before nightfall. However, the morning was as favorable as one could wish, and, incased in robes and blankets, I slid into the shoe-like sledge and was off, the central figure of the six sledges and a herd of howling dogs and drivers. The point at which we had encamped became speedily undistinguishable among the long line of apparently exactly similar localities ranging along the low shore. On in the gray snow-light, with a fierce wind sweeping down the long reaches of the lake; nothing spoken, for such cold weather makes men silent, morose, and savage.

Lake-travel, though rapid, is exceedingly harassing on account of the high winds which perpetually sweep over the immense plain of their frozen surface, intensifying even moderate cold to a painful degree. The ice is always rough, coated with snow of varying thickness, or drifted into hillocks and ridges, alternating with spots of glass-like smoothness, which are constantly upsetting the sledges. And this same upsetting, a trifling matter enough on shore, is likely to prove a serious annoyance where the hardness of the ice nearly breaks one's bones. The same hardness, too, increases the fatigue of sledge-travel, which at its best may be likened to sitting on a thin board dragged quickly over a newly-macadamized road. Then, too, the pedestrian on a frozen lake

labors under peculiar disadvantages. Where the snow lies deeply, the crust gives way at each step, precipitating the driver to the bottom with a sudden jar; where it lies thinly on the surface, or is drifted away, the hardness of the ice injures even the practiced *voyageurs*, causing swellings of the ankles and soles of the feet, and enlargement of the lower back sinews of the legs. Again, the winter traveler speedily discovers that very slight exercise induces copious perspiration, which in the most momentary halt, gets cold upon the skin, in fact, in a high wind, the exposed side will appear frozen over, while the rest of the body is comparatively warm and comfortable. Once cold in this way, it is almost impossible to get warm again without the heat of fire, or the severest exercise; and, should the latter be adopted, it must perforce be continued until a camping-place is reached. Moreover, to a strong man, there is something humiliating in being hauled about in a portable bed, like some feeble invalid, while the hardy *voyageurs* are maintaining their steady pace from hour to hour, day to day, or week to week; for fatigue seems with them an unknown word.

Toward noon there were indications that the prophetic skill of my heathen driver was about to be verified. The wind still kept dead against us, and at times it was impossible to face its terrible keenness. So great was the drift that it obscured the little light afforded by the sun—which was very low in the heavens—through a cloudy atmosphere. The dogs began to tire out; the ice cut their feet, and the white surface was often dotted with the crimson icicles that fell from their bleeding toes. The four canines hauling the provision-sled turned back whenever opportunity

presented, or faced about and sat shivering upon their haunches. Under these circumstances the anathemas of the Cree grew fearful to the ear; for, of all the qualifications requisite to the successful driving of dogs, none is more necessary than an ability to imprecate freely and with considerable variety in at least three different languages. But, whatever number of tongues be employed, one is absolutely indispensable to perfection in the art, and that is French. Whether the construction of that dulcet tongue enables the speaker to deliver profanity with more bullet-like force and precision, or to attain a greater degree of intensity than by other means, I know not; but I do know that, while curses seem useful adjuncts in any language, curses delivered in French will get a train of dogs through or over anything. For all dogs in the North it is the simplest mode of persuasion. If the dog lies down, curse him until he gèts up; if he turns about in the harness, curse him until he reverts to his original position; if he looks tired, curse him until he becomes animated; and, when you grow weary of cursing him, get another man to continue the process.

As the education of the Cree, so far as regarded the French language, had seemingly been conducted with an eye single to the acquirement of anathemas, which long practice enabled him to use with such effect that the dogs instinctively dodged them as if they had been the sweep of a descending lash, our speed at first was not materially affected by the attempted haltings of the weary animals. But, as the storm increased in violence, and the swirl of powdery snow swept in their faces, the dogs turned about more frequently, and seized every opportunity of shirking. Then ensued that inhuman thrashing and varied

cursing, that howling of dogs and systematic brutality of drivers, which make up the romance of winter-travel, and degrade the driver lower than the brutes. The perversion of the dog from his true use to that of a beast of burden is productive of countless forms of deception and cunning; but a life of bondage everywhere produces in the slave vices with which it is unfair to blame him. Dogs are often stubborn and provoking, and require flogging until brought into subjection; but lashings upon the body while laboring in the trains, systematic floggings upon the head till their ears drop blood, beatings with whip-stocks until nose and jaws are one deep wound, and poundings with clubs and stamping with boots till their howls merge into low wails of agony, are the frequent penalties of a slight deviation from duty.

Of the four dogs attached to the provision-sledge, three underwent repeated beatings at the hands of the Cree. By mid-afternoon the head of Whiskey was reduced to a bleeding, swollen mass from tremendous thrashings. Chocolat had but one eye wherewith to watch the dreaded driver, and Brandy had wasted so much strength in wild lurches and sudden springs, in order to dodge the descending whip, that he had none remaining for the legitimate task of hauling the sledge. But one train of dogs out of the six sledges fared better, and that one was composed of animals of the Esquimaux breed. Fox-headed, long-furred, clean-legged, whose ears, sharp-pointed and erect, sprang from a head imbedded in thick tufts of woolly hair, hauling to them was as natural as to watch is natural to the watch-dog. And of the whole race of dogs, the Esquimaux alone should be made a hauling-dog. He alone looks happy in his work, and is a good hauler; and although

other dogs will surpass him in speed for a few days, only he can maintain a steady pace throughout a long journey, and come in fresh at its end.

At length the violence of the storm forced us to seek the shore, and camp for the night; and no sooner had this been accomplished, and supper over, than the Cree, fearing a continuance of the storm, summoned a driver of the packet-trains to assist in performing a solemn invocation to the Manitou to stay the tempest. Rattles made of bladders, with pebbles in them, were brought out from their limited luggage; "medicine" belts of wolf-skin donned, and other "medicine" or magic articles, such as ermine-skins, and musk-rat skins, covered with beads and quills. Then the Cree and his companion drummed and rattled, and sang songs, finishing, after some hours, by a long speech, which they repeated together, in which they promised to give the Manitou a feast of fat meat, and to compose a new song in his praise immediately upon the cessation of the storm. After this performance they fell asleep. Long before daylight, however, I was awakened by the conjurers, who, in high glee, were cutting off tidbits of pemmican and casting them into the fire as the promised offering to the Manitou, at the same time chanting monotonously, and sounding their rattles. Then they engaged in feasting, and banished sleep by the persistency with which they sang the new song they pretended to have composed for the occasion, which they continued to sing over and over again without cessation until morning. As they had both been fast asleep all night, it is shrewdly suspected that they attempted to impose upon their Manitou by making shift with an old hymn,

for they certainly could have had no opportunity for composing the new one promised. However this may be, the Manitou performed his part, for the storm was much abated.

At an early hour a start was again made in the usual manner—the harsh command "Marche!" followed by deep-toned yells from the crouching dogs; then, a merciless beating and thumping, and the cowering animals at length set off with the heavy loads, howling as if their hearts would break. After the thrashing came the abuse and curses. Coffee would be appealed to "for the love of Heaven to straighten his traces." Chocolat would be solemnly informed that he was a migratory swindle, and possessed of no character whatever. Brandy would be entreated to "just see if he couldn't do a little better;" that he was the offspring of very disreputable parents, and would be thrashed presently. The passenger's only occupation was to keep from freezing. Vain task! Though buried head and all in two robes and a blanket, the wind found its way through everything, and the master, sitting still in his wraps, suffered more from cold than his man who was running against the wind, and suffered, besides, under the depressing sense of his idle helplessness, while the driver felt the cheering influence of hardy toil.

Thus we journeyed on, the incidents of one day being but an iteration of that preceding. For eight days our course led from point to point of the lake's shore, upon the immense surface of which our six fleeting sledges seemed the veriest crawling insects. Nevertheless, we passed in rapid flight, at last sweeping up the rocky promontory and within the palisade of

Norway House, like the ghostly stormers of the Rhenish castle. In this hospitable shelter we halted for a time, while the great Northern packet journeyed on toward the unknown land of the far North. The dogs slept quietly in their kennels; the heathen Cree, with his hardly-earned sovereigns, arrayed himself in more intricate apparel, and stalked a green-and-yellow apparition among the squalid *tepees* of a neighboring Indian camp.

CHAPTER II.

CANOE LIFE

SUMMER in the Fur Land treads so closely upon the heels of winter as to leave but little standing room for spring. About the second week in April the earth begins to soften; the forest becomes fragrant with last year's leaves and this year's buds; the little rills wander feebly riverward, and the wild duck wings its flight along the water-courses. During the following week the days grow soft and warm; rain falls in occasional showers; the thermometer varies from fifty to sixty degrees between daybreak and mid-afternoon. A few days later, the river, which hitherto has churlishly resisted all the advances of spring, begins to show symptoms of yielding at last to her soft entreaties. Tears rise upon his iron face, and flow down his frosted cheeks; his great heart seems to swell within him, and ominous groans break from his long-silent bosom. At night, however, he thinks better of it, and looks grim, rigid and unsusceptible in the early morning, as if slightly ashamed of his weakness. But spring, shower, and sun are at last too strong for him. All his children are already awake. They prattle and purl and pull at him, urging him to open his long closed eyelids, to look once more at the blue and golden summer.

With the coming of the delicate flowers and vernal bloom of early May, he gives way suddenly and throws off his icy mask. Inanimate nature seems to caress him for the sacrifice. The wild flowers and green grasses grow down close to the water's edge; the bright leaves spring forth and fling their shadows over the flood; the balsamic pine and fir kiss the placid surface with their overhanging branches. Animate nature expresses its joy. The teal, the widgeon, the mallard float upon its broad bosom; the grey goose and wavy crowd its estuaries; the crane stands motionless on one leg, knee-deep in the turbid tide; all the wild things of the water sport upon its surface.

The red man lifts his birch-bark canoe from its resting-place, and launches it upon the flood. It is as wild and beautiful as any bird of them all. Through the long winter it has lain beneath a covering of snow and branches; now, the wild swan and wavy, passing northward to the polar seas, wake it from its icy sleep. The canoe is a part of the savage; useless to carry the burden of man's labor, fitted alone for him and his ways. After generations of use, it has grown into the economy of his life. What the horse is to the Arab, the camel to the desert traveler, or the dog to the Esquimaux, the birch-bark canoe is to the Indian. The forests along the river shores yield all the materials requisite for its construction; cedar for its ribs; birch-bark for its outer covering; the thews of the juniper to sew together the separate pieces; red pine to give resin for the seams and crevices. It is built close to the hunting-lodge on river or lake shore.

"And the forest life is in it—
All its mystery and magic,
All the tightness of the birch-tree,
All the toughness of the cedar,
All the larch's supple sinews,
And it floated on the river
Like a yellow leaf in autumn,
Like a yellow water lily."

During the summer season the canoe is the home of the red man. It is not only a boat, but a house; he turns it over him as a protection when he camps; he carries it long distances over land from lake to lake. Frail beyond words, yet he loads it down to the water's edge. In it he steers boldly out into the broadest lake, or paddles through wood and swamp and reedy shallow—almost over dry land in a heavy dew. Sitting in it he gathers his harvest of wild rice, or catches fish, or steals upon his game; dashes down the wildest rapid, braves the foaming torrent, or lies like a wild bird on the placid waters. While the trees are green, while the waters dance and sparkle, and the wild duck dwells in the sedgy ponds, the birch-bark canoe is the red man's home.

And how well he knows the moods of the river! the multiplicity of its perils, and its ever-changing beauty! To him it is replete with all wild instincts. He speaks of it as he does of his horse, or his dog, who will do whatever he commands. It gives him his test of superiority, his proof of courage. To guide his canoe through some whirling eddy, to shoot some roaring waterfall, to launch it by the edge of some fiercely-rushing torrent, or dash down a foaming rapid, is to be a brave and skillful Indian. The man who does all this, and does it well, must possess a rapidity of glance, a

power in the sweep of his paddle, and a quiet consciousness of skill, not attained save by long years of practice.

An exceedingly light and graceful craft is the birch-bark canoe; a type of speed and beauty. So light that one man can easily carry it on his shoulder over land where a waterfall obstructs his progress; and as it only sinks five or six inches in the water, few places are too shallow to float it. The bark of the birch-tree, of which it is made, is about a quarter of an inch thick. Inside of it is laid a lining of extremely thin flakes of wood, over which are driven a number of light bows to give strength and solidity to the canoe. In this frail bark, which measures anywhere from twelve to forty feet long, and from two to five feet broad in the middle, the Indian and his family travel over the innumerable lakes and rivers, and the fur-hunters pursue their lonely calling.

In the old life of the wilderness the canoe played an important part, and the half-breed *voyageur* was a skilled rival of the red man in its management. Before the consolidation of the Fur Companies,* when rival corporations contended for the possession of the trade of the Fur Land, the echoes along the river reaches and gloomy forests were far oftener and more loudly awakened than now. The Northwest Company, having its head-quarters in Montreal, imported its entire supplies into the country and exported all their furs out of it in north canoes. Carrying on business upon an extended scale, the traffic was correspondingly great. Not less than ten brigades, each numbering twenty canoes, passed

* The Hudson's Bay, Northwest, and X. Y. Companies.

over the route during the summer months. The first half of the journey, over the great lakes, was made in very large canoes, known as *canotes de maitre*, a considerable number of which are still kept at the border posts for the use of the company's travelers. These canoes are of the largest size, exceeding the north canoe in length by several feet, besides being much broader and deeper. They are, however, too large and cumbersome for traveling in the interior—where the canoe goes literally over hill and dale—requiring four men to carry them instead of two, like the north canoe; besides, they are capable of carrying twice as much cargo, and are paddled by fourteen or sixteen *voyageurs*.

The north canoe, the ideal craft of the summer *voyageur*, and which still plays an important part in the fur-trade, is a light and graceful vessel about thirty-six feet long, by four or five broad, and capable of containing eight men and three passengers. Made entirely of birch-bark, it is gaudily painted on bow and stern with those mystical figures which the superstitious boatmen believe to increase its speed. In this fairy-like craft the traveler sweeps swiftly over the long river-reaches; the bright vermilion paddles glancing in the sunshine, and the forests echoing back the measures of some weird boat-song, sung by the *voyageurs* in full chorus; now floating down a swiftly-rushing rapid, again gliding over the surface of a quiet lake, or making a portage over land where a rapid is too dangerous to descend.

Those who have not seen it can have but a faint idea of the picturesque effects of these passing canoe-brigades.

Sweeping suddenly round some promontory in the wilderness, they burst unexpectedly upon the view, like some weird phantom of mirage. At the same moment the wild yet simple *chansons* of the *voyageurs* strike upon the ear :

" Qui en a composé la chanson ?
C'est Pierre Falcon ! le bon garçon !
Elle a été faite et composé
Sur le victoire que nous avons gagné !
Elle a été faite et composé
Chantons la gloire de tous ces Bois-brules !"

Sung with all the force of a hundred voices ; which, rising and falling in soft cadences in the distance, as it is borne lightly upon the breeze, then more steadily as they approach swells out in the rich tones of many a mellow voice, and bursts at last into a long, enthusiastic chorus. The deep forests and precipitous banks echo back the refrain in varying volume ; the long line of canoes is half shrouded in the spray that flies from the bright vermilion paddles, as they are urged over the water with the speed of the flying deer, until, sweeping round some projecting headland, they disappear, like " the baseless fabric of a dream."

But the winged passage of these birds of flight conveys but a faint idea of the sensation experienced on witnessing the arrival of a brigade at an inland post after a long journey. It is then they appear in all their wild perfection ; and the spectator catches a glimpse of the supreme picturesqueness of the Fur Land. The *voyageurs* upon such occasions are attired in their most bewildering apparel, and gaudy feathers,

ribbons and tassels stream in abundance from their caps and garters. Gayly ornamented, and ranged side by side, like contending chariots in the arena, the frail canoes skim like a bird of passage over the water; scarcely seeming to touch it under the vigorous and rapid strokes of the small but numerous paddles by which the powerful *voyageurs* strain every muscle and nerve to urge them on. A light mist, rising from the river, etches them while yet afar in shadowy outline, augmenting their symmetry, like a veil thrown over the face of Beauty. The beautifully simple, lively, yet plaintive *chanson*, so much in unison with, that it seems a part of, the surrounding scenery, and yet so different from any other melody, falls sweetly upon the ear. In the distance it comes with the pleasing melancholy of "Home, Sweet Home!" and seems the vocal expression of the *voyageurs'* thoughts of their native land. On its nearer approach, it changes the feeling into one of exultation, as the deep manly voices swell in chorus over the placid waters—the "Marseillaise" of the wilderness.

Nearing the landing, a spirit of competition arises as to who shall arrive first. The long canoes speed over the waters, like a flight of arrows, to the very edge of the wharf; then, as if by magic, come suddenly to a pause. The paddles are rolled on the gunwale simultaneously, enveloping their holders in a shower of spray, as they shake the dripping water from the bright vermilion blades, and climb lightly from their seats.

Canoe travel in the Fur Land presents many picturesque phases. Just as the first faint tinge of coming dawn steals

over the east, the canoe is lifted gently from its ledge of rock and laid upon the water. The blankets, the kettles, the guns, and all the paraphernalia of the camp, are placed in it, and the swarthy *voyageurs* step lightly in. All but one. He remains on shore to steady the bark on the water, and keep its sides from contact with the rock. It is necessary to be thus careful with canoes, as the gum or pitch with which the sides are plastered breaks off in lumps, and makes the craft leaky. The passenger takes his place in the centre, the outside man springs gently in, and the birch-bark canoe glides away from its rocky resting-place.

Each hour reveals some new phase of beauty, some changing scene of lonely grandeur. The canoe sweeps rapidly over the placid waters; now buffets with, and advances against, the rushing current of some powerful river, which seems to bid defiance to its further progress; again, is carried over rocks and through deep forests, when some foaming cataract bars its way; and yet again, dashes across some silvery lake with a favoring breeze. The clear unruffled water studded with innumerable islets, stretches out to the horizon, reflecting the wooded isles and timber-clad bluffs upon its margin. The morning sun, rising in a sea of light, burnishes the motionless expanse with a golden sheen, and turns the myriad of dew-drops upon the overhanging foliage into sparkling diamonds.

But there falls upon the ear the rush and roar of water; and, rounding some wooded promontory, or pine-clad island, the canoe shoots toward a tumbling mass of spray and foam, studded with huge projecting rocks which mark a river rapid.

It is a wild scene of wood and rock and water; but the *voyageurs* advance upon it with a calm assurance. The boiling rapid is nothing to them. All their lives long they have lived among them. They have been the playthings of their early youth, the realities of their middle life, the instinctive habit of their old age. As the canoe approaches the foaming flood, advantage is taken of the back current created by the mad rush of the mid-stream, and flowing backward close to the banks, to push the frail craft as far up the rapid as possible. Then the *voyageur* in the bow—the important seat in the management of the canoe—rises upon his knees, and closely scans the wild scene before attempting the ascent. Sinking down again, he seizes the paddle, and pointing significantly to a certain spot in the chaos of boiling waters before him, dashes into the stream.

The rushing flood seems to bear the light canoe down with the speed of an arrow; the water boils and hisses to within an inch of the gunwale; and to an unaccustomed traveler it seems folly to attempt the ascent. But the skilled canoemen know every feature of the rapid. In the centre of the boiling flood a large black rock rises above the surface. From its lower side a long eddy runs, like the tail of a fish, down the stream. It is just opposite this rock that the canoe leaves the back current, and toward it the *voyageurs* paddle with all their might. Swept down by the force of the stream, however, they just reach the extreme point of the eddy; but a few vigorous strokes of the paddle float the canoe quietly in the lee of the rock. Here a momentary halt is made—just long enough to

look for another rock. The bowsman again selects one a few yards higher up, and a good deal to one side. The paddles are dipped once more, the canoe heads into the torrent again, and the sheltering eddy of the second rock is soon reached. Yard by yard the rapid is thus ascended, sometimes scarcely gaining a foot a minute, again advancing more rapidly, until at last the light craft floats upon the very lip of the fall, and a long smooth piece of water stretches away up the stream.

Frequently the ascent is not made without mishap. Sometimes the canoe runs against a stone, and tears a small hole in the bottom. This obliges the *voyageurs* to put ashore immediately and repair the damage. They do it swiftly and with admirable dexterity. Into the hole is fitted a piece of bark; the fibrous roots of the pine-tree, called "watape," sew it in its place; a small fire is made and pitch melted, and the place plastered so as to be effectually water-tight, all within the space of an hour. Again, the current is too strong to admit of the use of paddles, and recourse is had to poling, if the stream be shallow, or tracking if the depth of water forbid the use of poles. The latter is an extremely toilsome process, and would detract much from the romance of canoe-life in the wilderness were it not for the beautiful scenery through which the traveler passes.

Rapid after rapid is surmounted; and yet, with every rounding of point and headland, rapids and falls arise in seemingly endless succession. Fairy islets, covered to the very edge of the rippling water with luxuriant vegetation, rise like emeralds from the broad bosom of the river; white-

winged birds sail about the canoes, or rise in graceful circles into the azure sky, and long lines of waterfowl whirr past in rapid flight.

But if the rushing or breasting up a rapid is exciting, the operation of shooting them in a birch-bark canoe is doubly so, True, all the perpendicular falls have to be "portaged," and in a day's journey of forty miles, from twelve to fifteen portages have to be made. But the rapids are as smooth water to the hardy *voyageurs*, who, in anything less than a perpendicular fall, seldom lift the canoe from the water. And it is impossible to find anything in life which so effectually condenses intense nervous excitement into the shortest possible compass of time as does the running of an immense rapid. No toil is required, but as much coolness, skill, and dexterity as man can throw into the work of hand, eye, and head. He must know where to strike and how to do it; the position of every rock, the sweep of every drop of water, and the combinations which rock and water in relative positions will assume.

As the frail birch-bark nears the rapid from above, all is quiet. One cannot see what is going on below the first rim of the rush; but tiny spirals of spray and the deafening roar of falling water give a fair premonition of what is to be expected. The most skillful *voyageur* sits on his heels in the bow of the canoe, the next best oarsman similarly placed in the stern. The hand of the bowsman becomes a living intelligence as, extended behind him, it motions the steersman where to turn the craft. The latter never takes his eye off that hand for an instant. Its varied expression becomes the life of the canoe.

The bowsman peers straight ahead with a glance like that of an eagle. He has got a rock or splintered stump on shore to steer by, and knows well the only door by which the slope of water can be entered. The canoe, seeming like a cockle-shell in its frailty, silently approaches the rim where the waters disappear from view. On the very edge of the slope the bowsman suddenly stands up, and bending forward his head, peers eagerly down the eddying rush, then falls upon his knees again. Without turning his head for an instant, the sentient hand behind him signals its warning to the steersman; then the canoe is in the very rim; she dips down the slant, shooting her bow clear out of water, and falling hard and flat on the lower incline.

Now there is no time for thought; no eye is quick enough to take in the rushing scene. Here peers a rock just above the surface, there yawns a big green cave of water; here a place that looks smooth-running for a moment, suddenly opens up into great gurgling chasms sucking down the frail canoe. There are strange currents, unexpected whirls, and backward eddies and rocks—rocks rough and jagged, smooth, slippery, and polished—and through all this the canoe glances like an arrow, dips like a wild bird down the wing of the storm; now slanting with a strange side motion from a rock, as if with an instinctive shrinking from its presence; now perched upon the very edge of a green cavern, with one foot almost in a watery grave, as it were; now breaking through a backward eddy, as if eager to run its wild race. Ofttimes a huge rock, time-stained and worn, stands full in the midst of

the channel, seeming to present an obstacle from which escape is impossible. The canoe rushes full toward it, and no human power can save it from being dashed to pieces. Stay! there is just one power that can do it, and that is provided by the rock itself. No skill of man could run the canoe on to that rock! The fierce current splits upon it, and a wilder sweep of water rushes off both its polished sides than on to them. The instant the canoe touches that sweep it dashes off with redoubled speed. The jagged rock is a haven of safety compared to the treacherous whirlpool and twisting billow.

All this time not a word is spoken; but every now and again there is a quick convulsive twist of the bow paddle to edge far off some rock, to put her full through some boiling billow, to hold her steady down the slope of some thundering chute. All this is wild life if you will; but how tame and bare the simple narrative of these facts appears beside their actual realization in a north canoe manned by dusky *voyageurs!*

But the old canoe-life of the Fur Land is rapidly passing away. The unpicturesque Mackinaw boat has usurped the place of the birch-bark canoe, and the forests no longer echo the refrain of the *voyageur's* boat-song. The passage of three or four canoes once or twice a year is all that breaks the silence of the scene. In many a once well-beaten pathway, nought save narrow trails over the portages, and rough wooden crosses over the graves of travelers who perished by the way, remain to mark the roll of the passing years.

CHAPTER III.

THE HALF-BREED VOYAGEUR.*

IN a narrative of travel through the Hudson's Bay Territory in 1859, by Lord Southesk, is given the following pen-portrait of James McKay, a half-breed Indian guide:

"A Scotchman, though with Indian blood on his mother's side, he was born and bred in the Saskatchewan country, but afterward became a resident of Fort Garry, and entered the company's employ. Whether as guide or hunter, he was universally reckoned one of their best men. Immensely broad-chested and muscular, though not tall, he weighed eighteen-stone; yet, in spite of his stoutness, he was exceedingly hardy and active, and a wonderful horseman.

"His face—somewhat Assyrian in type—is very handsome; short, delicate, aquiline nose; piercing, dark-grey eyes; long, dark brown hair, beard, and mustache; small white, regular teeth; skin tanned to a regular bronze by exposure to the weather. He was dressed in a blue-cloth *capote* (hooded frock-coat), with brass buttons, red-and-black

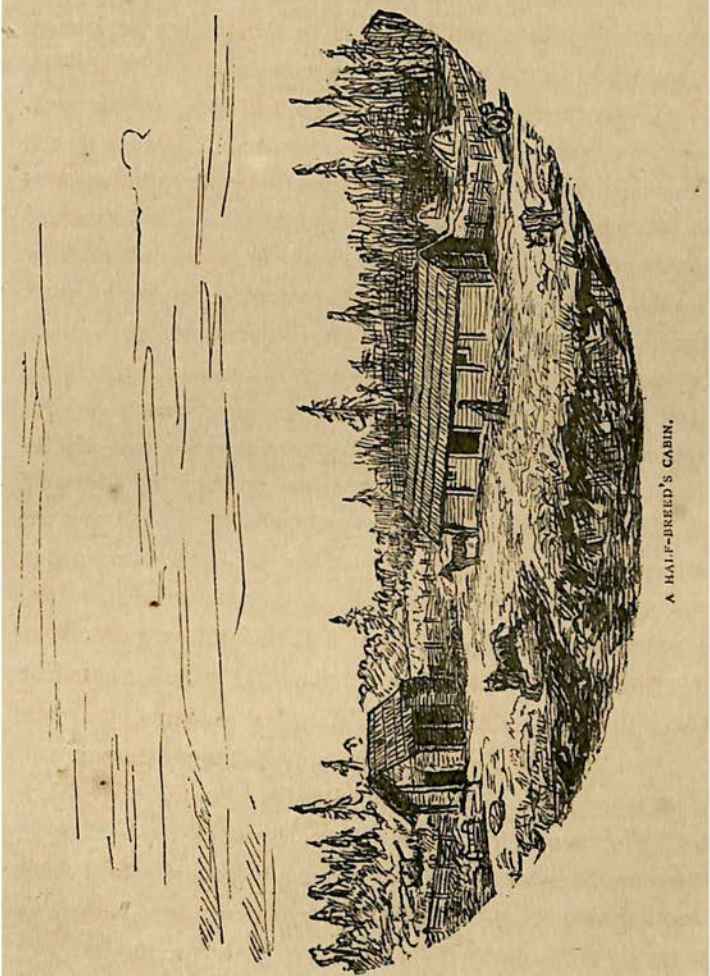
* The term "half-breed" is applied indiscriminately in the Fur Land to all persons having Indian blood in their veins, and bears no especial reference to quantity. In very many instances it is difficult to tell exactly where the half-breed ends and the white man begins.

flannel shirt, which served also for waist-coat; buff-leather moccasins on his feet, black belt around his waist; trousers of brown-and-white-striped home-made woolen stuff."

This etching of McKay will do duty, in all essential points, as the correct portraiture of a large and distinct class of people inhabiting the Fur Land, and scattered over our own northern frontier, familiarly known as half-breeds, who, neither Indian nor white, possess all the craft of one and a fair degree of the intelligence of the other. Familiar with the customs of both from infancy, they adopt many of the habits of civilized life; but, though existing under an improved exterior, the romantic life, the custom, mode of thought, and language of the Indians, retain their hold on the affections of their descendants to successive generations. Thus a man whose usual language is English, and one who speaks French alone, are enabled to render themselves mutually intelligible by means of Cree, their Indian mother tongue, though each is totally ignorant of the civilized language ordinarily used by the other.

At the beginning of the present century, when the rival Canadian fur companies, known as the X. Y. and Northwest Companies, were engaged in fierce competition with the Hudson's Bay Company for the possession of the Indian trade, there sprung into existence, in the exigencies of this special service, a class of men known as *coureurs des bois*, or wood-runners. They were French colonists, whose spirit of adventure, stimulated by a desire of gain, and love for the free roving Indian life, led them to pursue the calling of trappers

and traders, betaking themselves to the woods and hunting-grounds of Canada, and spreading gradually over the whole country east from the height of land west of Lake Superior. As hunters and trappers they were even more skillful than their Indian teachers. As traders they were outfitted by the Canadian companies with the necessary goods to barter with the Indians for furs; and, after periods of absence extending over twelve or fifteen months, spent in traveling in their canoes, would return laden with furs of great value, their share of which they regularly squandered during a short residence in the towns or cities, previous to embarking on their next voyage. After the coalition of the competing fur companies, in the year 1821, and their consequent loss of employment as traders, these *coureurs des bois* gradually spread farther into the interior, and penetrated the unsettled districts of Dakota and Manitoba, and the nearer Lake Superior region. In place of traders, they became more especially hunters and trappers, disposing of their furs and produce at the trading-posts scattered throughout the country, and near which they invariably settled. Rarely ever did they return to their native land. The wild roving life in the wilderness had too much of excitement in it to permit of a voluntary return to the narrow limits of civilization. Moreover, the wood-runner had taken to himself an Indian wife; and although the marriage ceremony had lacked the essentials of bell, book, and candle, yet he got along pretty well with his squaw; and olive branches, jabbering a very few civilized tongues and a great many heathen ones, began to multiply about him.



A HALF-BREED'S CABIN.

In addition to hunting and trapping, the wood-runners became canoe-men and freighters to the trading-companies, or engaged in certain miniature agricultural pursuits tending to increase their subsistence. To the half-breed children—a numerous progeny—of these French and Indian parents, descended the vocation of the father, and the nomadic instincts of the mother, resulting in the production of a civilized nomad who unites the industries of both civilized and savage life. To this element may be added a considerable number of *metis*, the offspring of the Scotch and English employés of the trading corporations, and the half-breeds of the old *regime*, resident on the Canadian coasts—for the most part the poorest representatives of their class. Scattered over the vast country from the Canadas to the Pacific coast, and from the Coteau of the Missouri to the Saskatchewan, the half-breed forms the advance-guard of civilization, ahead even of the white pioneer. His paternity may be French, English, or Scotch—his maternity Chippewa, Cree, or Sioux; but his vocation will always be the same, until, by admixture of lighter or darker blood, he becomes resolved into one of his original elements.

As a rule, the French half-breed—by far the largest and most representative class—is eminently social in disposition, and gregarious in his habits. As a consequence, he lives in communities, more or less miniature, during the winter months, and trades and hunts in bands during the summer. He enjoys company and is loath to be alone. Like his wealthier white brethren, he affects two annual residences—a log-house for his hibernal months, and a wigwam for the summer solstice. As

a rule, he may be addressed at the former. About it he has some arable ground, which he cultivates in a feeble and uncertain manner. He scratches the surface of the ground, and expects it to be prolific. Not being fond of labor, the weeds are allowed to choke the crop, the fences to fall into decay, and a general air of wreck to take possession of his tiny farm. This appearance of improvidence becomes perennial, not apparently getting worse or better, but remaining at about the same state year after year. The scanty crops, when gathered and stacked in the open air, in irregular piles, contribute to the general tumble-down aspect. Indian ponies, with their usual worn-out and overworked look, wander about the premises, or stand engaged in melancholy retrospection. About the door-yard are a few wooden carts—whose antecedents date back to the fields of Normandy—guiltless of iron, in a state of greater or less fracture, bound up with rawhide, and ornamented with rusty sets of harness. There may possibly be a cow on the premises, though not likely to be, as she would be killed and eaten the first time her improvident owner ran short of provisions. There are dogs, however, and in proportion as the *metis* is poor, the number of canines increases.

The dwelling itself, except in the mid-winter months, presents an appearance of decay. The plaster placed in the interstices of the logs crumbles under the action of the elements, and falls about the foundation of the building in muddy heaps. The thatch or clapboards of the roof are loosened in places, and are certain not to be repaired until the next winter. Internally the house is one single apartment; occasionally, in

the better class, though rarely, two apartments. The floor is of planks sawed or hewed by hand; the ceiling, if there is any, of the same material. In one corner is the only bed, a narrow couch, painted, generally, an ultra-marine blue, or a vivid sea-green. An open fire-place occupies one end of the apartment, with the chimney within the walls. A table, one or two chairs, a few wooden trunks or boxes—doing duty with this people everywhere as table, chair, clothes-press, and cupboard—and a dresser, constitute the furniture. About the walls somewhere, more especially over the bed, hang colored prints of the Virgin, the sacred heart, etc., together with a rosary. It may be that the daughter of the house—and there always is a daughter—has come under the influence of a convent for a season, and can read; perhaps write. In that event, there is a copy of the "Lives of the Saints" on a bracket; and, it may be, a few periodicals. For the rest, the apartment is cheerless and uninviting. It may be clean, but the chances are that it is not. That peculiar aroma, too, which pervades all inhabited chambers, here becomes often aggressive, and, as it were, wrestles with the visitor for the mastery.

In this apartment the family herd—a squaw mother often, and children so numerous and dirty as to be a wonder to behold. During the day its utter inefficiency to adequately accommodate the numbers it shelters is partially concealed, from the fact that they are seldom all in at one time. But on the approach of night, when the dusky brood are all housed, the question of where they are to sleep becomes startlingly prominent.

We remember well our first experience in the solution of this difficulty. Caught one stormy winter's evening, on the banks of a northern river, without preparations for camping, our uncivilized guide halted before the door of a small cabin, and asked permission to remain over-night. Hospitality being one of the savage virtues, the request was readily granted. After a meagre supper of fish without salt, and a post-prandial smoke, we began to look about for a couch for the night. Nothing was visible save one narrow bed, in which our host and his swarthy consort soon retired. Now, in addition to ourselves and guide, there were thirteen of the family, composed of children, male and female, from infancy to mature age. Where were they all to sleep? We thought of a possible loft; but there was no ceiling. Finally, we were about making preparations to sit before the fire all night when, from trunks and boxes were produced blankets and robes, and a shake-down made on the floor, into which we were directed to crawl. Scarcely had we done so, when our bed began to widen, and in a few minutes extended from wall to wall. Soon we found ourselves the central figure in a closely-packed bed of thirteen, filled promiscuously with males and females. We thought involuntarily of the great bed of Ware and its thirty occupants.

The occupations of the half-breed, when not engaged as *voyageur** or agriculturist, are limited to fishing in the stream

The term "*voyageur*," as used in the North, is not necessarily restricted to boatmen or canoe-men, but is also applied to all persons connected with the fur trade as freighters, guides, hunters, trappers, etc.

near his residence, hunting for small game, the care of his ponies, and a round of social visits to his neighbors. The two former are followed only to the extent of furnishing a supply of food for the day, to-morrow being left to care for itself. The idea of accumulating supplies of provisions in advance, save in the late fall, never apparently enters the half-breed mind. If he fails to secure sufficient game or fish for the day's provision, he simply goes without his dinner; nor do frequent privations of this sort seem to impress upon his volatile mind the policy of reserving of present excess for future scarcity. But, should he by some fortuitous circumstance become possessed of a surplus of salable provision, its ownership becomes a consuming flame to him until disposed of. The idea of keeping any thing which he can sell is an absurdity which his intellect cannot grasp.

It is in the winter season, when the cold has put an end to their labors for the most part, and the cares of existence are lightened by reason of advances made them upon the work of the approaching season, or the fair supply of provisions laid by from the last, that the social life of the half-breeds may be said to be at its highest. It is then that they marry and are given in marriage; that feasting, dancing, and merry-makings of all descriptions, do much abound. Every log-house then echoes to the violin of some moccasined and straight-haired Paganini, who after years of sedulous practice has attained a certain ghastly facility of execution.

It is rumored weekly that, at the residence of Baptiste, or Pascal, or Antoine, there will be given a dance, and the rumor

is accepted as a general invitation. The young bucks of the neighborhood array themselves in the bewildering apparel which obtains upon occasions of this nature: a blue-cloth capote, with brass buttons; black or drab corduroy trousers, the æsthetic effect of which is destroyed by a variegated sash, with fringed ends pendent about the knees; moccasins, and a fur cap with gaudy tassel. The young maidens apparel themselves in sombre prints or woolen stuffs, but with bright-colored shawls about their shoulders. This, with a false lustre upon their black locks, from copious applications of grease, is all that is showy about them. The dances are reels and square-dances. When they begin, however, they continue for days at a time; the younger people occupying the night, and the older ones the day, repairing home to rest, and then returning. Custom makes it obligatory upon the entertainers to furnish food and liquor for the dancers, and there is a vast consumption of both. It frequently happens that, from the number of participants, and the long continuance of the dance, the amount of supplies demanded reduces the host to poverty. We have known repeated instances where at one ball, continuing three or four days, the entire winter's provision for a family was consumed, and ponies were sold to pay for the liquor. Yet, the improvident half-breed thinks nothing of it, and gives the ball, well knowing the result. He wants either a feast or a famine. If he spends his substance for others, however, he retaliates by haunting all the festivities of his neighbors during the entire winter.

At home, when not engaged in dancing and feasting, or

taken up with the sordid and petty cares of his existence, the half-breed smokes and drinks tea. His consumption of tobacco is ceaseless, and his libations of tea would do no discredit to John Chinaman. If he hires out by the day to labor, he spends ten minutes of each hour in filling and lighting his pipe ; if he is voyaging, he halts at every headland or wooded promontory to put his kettle on and drink tea. Of a winter's day he curls up by his neighbor's fire, and smokes and relates his adventures. His life has run in a limited channel, but he knows every point in its course. Virtues may have abounded in it, but cakes and ale have much more abounded. But we may learn from it that many admirable things are consonant with an entire ignorance of books.

When the ploughing is done in the spring-time, and the seed in the ground, the half-breed agriculturist experiences a yearning for the chase, or goes to fulfill his engagement as *voyageur*. If the former, the fractured wooden carts are bound up with rawhide thongs, the broken-spirited ponies coaxed into a semblance of life and vigor, the dusky progeny packed in with boxes and blankets, the house locked up, and the migratory family set forth for the prairie or stream. With the first pitching of the wigwam the manners and customs of civilized life cease, and the half-breed assumes the habits of a savage. He hunts for the pot ; for this spring-time chase is simply to obtain daily subsistence while his meagre crops mature. His tent is encountered in the usual Indian haunts—by the side of a stream or lake, or half hidden in some timber-bluff on the prairie. He has become a nomad pure and simple. But,

when the harvest-time approaches, he returns again to his miniature farm. In a negligent manner his crop is gathered and thrashed. Reserving barely sufficient for the winter's needs, the remainder is sold, and with the proceeds an outfit for the long fall hunt is purchased. Perhaps, if they can be obtained on credit, a few goods are selected for trade with his savage brethren. Again, with his family, he seeks the prairie and stream, and hunts for his winter's food, trading betimes for such furs as may yield a profit. Later in the fall he returns to his winter's residence, adds a few repairs to its leaky roof, plasters up the interstices in its log walls, and settles down to hibernal monotony and the dance.

If the half-breed is a *voyageur* or guide, the task of cultivating the garden-plot is left to the members of his family, if he have one, the season of his service being the summer and fall months. For the most part, however, little or no planting is done by this class. They rely for support on a system of advances, which obtains with the trading corporations of the wilderness. Engagements are generally made in the month of December for a certain trip or amount of service, either boating or land freighting, to be performed during the ensuing season. A small advance is made the *voyageur* at that time, to bind the bargain, as it were. When the meal becomes low in the measure and the wine gone from the jar, he repairs to his employers, and at times receives small advances. If he is economical—which he seldom or never is—these advances may eke him out a scanty subsistence until spring and labor arrive. The probabilities are, however, that he is prodigal, has his

feast, and then lives, in want and squalor, upon any refuse that may come to hand. Nevertheless, he accepts the situation as a matter of course, and is light-hearted through it all. At the opening of navigation he receives another advance, which is quickly spent; then takes his place on the benches of an inland boat or canoe, pulls an oar hundreds of miles into the interior, and crosses long portages with the huge packages of the cargo strapped to his back. Over vast and trackless wildernesses echoes his monotonous boat-song; on many a bleak promontory shine his camp-fires; and isolated posts waken into life and joy for one day in the year at his coming. His journey made, and the cargoes exchanged with boats from yet farther inland, or distributed at the numerous forts on the way, the *voyageur* returns home again, receives the remnant of his wages, to be dissipated in the shortest possible time; then relapses into a condition of uncertain sparring with destiny for diurnal sustenance.

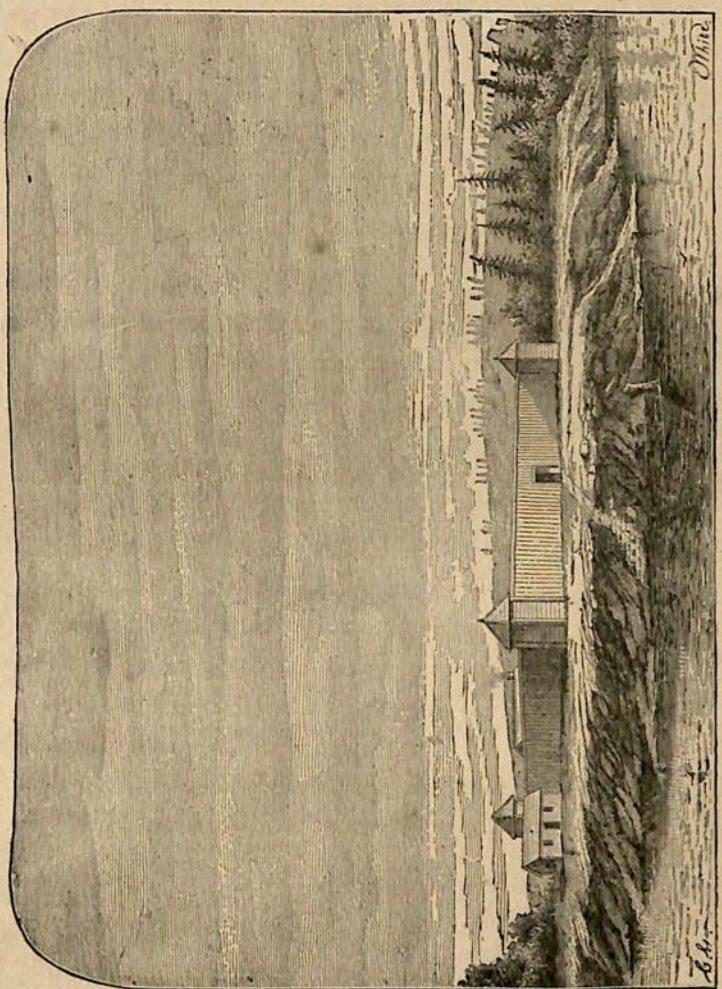
If he be freighter, the life is essentially the same: merely exchanging the boat for the wooden carts, creaking their way in long lines over the plains, like a caravan in the desert. His days are spent in toil, his nights in fighting stinging insects, or shivering in the cold and wet. But his good-nature never tires; his pipe is smoked in quiet satisfaction under all circumstances, and no occasion is too serious to prevent the perpetration of his practical joke.

The tastes of the half-breed are of a decided sort, and essentially like those of other mixed races. In apparel, he is fond of color, and, in most instances, exhibits good taste in

the combinations he effects. Ornaments, too, are held in great favor, quality not being so much sought for as quantity. In this regard, however, there is a marked decadence from the extravagant ornamentation of former days. We remember when the arrival of the plain-hunters at our border-posts was the signal of a dress-parade which, if lacking in artistic merit, amply atoned by its rainbow hues and constellations of tawdry jewelry. Ofttimes the entire profits of a season's trade would be invested in highly-colored wearing-apparel and cheap jewelry, in which the hunter decked his tawny family and himself, and paraded the adjoining camps, with all the pride of a Hottentot chief. It was a brave and pleasant show, nevertheless, to see these athletic men and supple and graceful women, arrayed in holiday attire, galloping swiftly and lightly over the green prairies. Unfortunately, after this parade of bravery, the demon of thirst would seize them, and, if liquor was attainable, the rivalry of dress was succeeded by a rivalry of drink, ending in a low debauch; for, in his tastes and appetites, our half-brother follows the maternal root.

The religion of the half-breed is the creed of superstition. Roman Catholic in the main, he adds to its formulas a shadowy belief in the Great Spirit. He acknowledges a purgatory, yet fondly hopes that in the next world human shades will hunt the shades of buffalo and other animals which have lived here. When he dies, he hopes to be carried to the bosom of the saints; yet he feels that his shade will linger four nights round the place of his decease ere taking its flight to the village of the dead. He believes in signs and omens to some extent, and

ties a certain number of feathers to his horse's tail, or paints rude emblems on his bark canoe, to increase their speed. Nevertheless, he yields implicit obedience to his priest, and obeys, in his volatile way, the traditions of his Church; but, over all, cherishes a dim faith in the shades of shadow-land.



A HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY'S POST.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY.

FOR more than two centuries British North America has been occupied by the Hudson's Bay Company, which has turned the country to the best account possible by utilizing the sole portion of its wealth which, on account of the barbarous nature of the region and its almost unparalleled completeness of isolation, could be profitably exported. This is its furs. At various periods attempts have been made to give an impetus to the pursuit of other branches of industry by the formation of subordinate companies; but, like the dwellings of the region, such institutions have hitherto held their existence by a frail tenure, amounting almost to an artificial life. The fur-trade alone possesses strong vitality. And although this branch of industry, in its relations to the few small settlements of the country, has been much and most ignorantly abused by one-sided reasoners, of late years, as the all-devouring monster which monopolizes the resources of the territory, yet the fairer course would be to describe it as the motive spring which gives life to anything in the way of business existing there. Furs compose the only species of merchandise in the country the export of which is remunerative, and, without them, even what market exists for other commodities

would speedily disappear. In fact, the influence of the trade permeates all classes; everybody talks fur, and every available position in the accessible parts of the territory is seized upon by free-traders for the collection of peltries. But while many are gathered in this way, and traders speedily grow rich, their furs form scarcely a drop in the bucket when compared to the vast collections of the Hudson's Bay Company. It is only a vast corporation, possessed of unlimited means, long experience, and immense facilities for transportation, that can hope to compete with this last great monopoly.

It is, of course, to be expected that, as the wave of population rolls westward, the agricultural and other latent resources possessed by the immense territory will be developed, and the fortunes of the dwellers in that remote region no longer depend solely upon the success of the warfare maintained by the Indian against the wild beasts of the North; but it is undeniable that, until the present decade, the trade which from a single department alone brings annually to the English market an average value of £150,000 in furs, and in the aggregate furnishes the world with three-fourths of its peltries, has presented the only means of commercially benefiting the aboriginal tribes, or of turning to profitable account the inaccessible regions over which its operations extend.

The Hudson's Bay Company is a wheel within a wheel, consisting of the company proper, which furnishes the capital stock, and the partnership of the Fur Trade, which is employed to carry out the actual workings of the business. Under the charter, the supreme control of its affairs is vested

in a Board consisting of a Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee of five Directors, all annually chosen by the stockholders at a meeting held each November at the company's house in London. These functionaries delegate their authority to an officer resident in their American possessions, called the Governor-in-chief of Rupert's Land, who acts as their representative. His commission extends over all their colonial possessions, and his tenure of office is unlimited as regards time. Sir George Simpson, the Arctic explorer, in company with Dease, was the first person appointed to fill this high office, which was instituted immediately after the coalition of the Hudson's Bay and Northwest Companies in 1821. Previous to that date the various districts had been ruled by numerous petty officers, subject to no efficient control, and practically answerable to none for abuse of power.

The authority of the Governor-in-chief is supreme, except during the session of his council, which is held once a year, and continues its formal sittings for two or three days. The Governor is president or chairman of this council, at which he represents the interests of the Board of Directors in England. It is called the "Council for the Northern Department of Rupert's Land," yet it assumes a general authority over all other departments, and, to quote the words of the preamble to its official minutes, it convenes "for the purpose of establishing rules and regulations for conducting the business of said department, and in order to investigate the trade of the past year."

As before stated, a council for the Northern department

is held every year, and at it the Governor-in-chief is invariably present; but he, also, from time to time, has held councils for other departments, though his usual plan is to leave the details to be managed by competent officials on the spot, and, by correspondence, exercise a general jurisdiction over the trade. His council is composed of the highest rank of officers in the service, called Chief Factors, whose duty and right is to sit at its meetings whenever their attendance is practicable. Members of the second rank of commissioned officers, called Chief Traders, when they can arrange to be present, are also requested to sit in the council, which is held with closed doors, and when so invited, the traders are permitted to debate and vote equally with the factors. The chief factors and chief traders together constitute the partnership in what is called the "Fur Trade." From this the profits of the Hudson's Bay Company may be said to be entirely derived; it constitutes the means by which the company avails itself of the right to trade, which it possesses in its territories. Vacancies in its ranks are immediately filled up as they occur from the death or retirement of its members, the qualification necessary to obtain the commission being a majority of the votes of all the chief factors. The candidates for a factorship are necessarily traders, while those for a vacant tradership are from the ranks of salaried clerks, seldom of less than fourteen years' standing in the service.

The members of the Fur Trade, also called "Wintering Partners," furnish none of the capital stock, and receive their commissions merely as the reward of long and faithful service.

Their pay is a definite number of shares of stock, never exceeding a certain limit. Of these, a chief factor possesses two, and a chief trader one, so that their emoluments are directly affected by the fluctuations of the trade equally with those of other stockholders. While the Fur Trade is recognized as a partnership by the company, yet it is allowed no distinct organization. No annual election of officers forming anything like the company's London Board takes place among the partners of the Fur Trade, who, scattered over the vast territories of the company, could not, under existing circumstances, take united action in any matter, how nearly soever it might affect their corporate interests. The only approximation to a common action which exists is afforded by the meeting of the annual council, at which all factors within practicable distance are entitled, and traders, under similar circumstances, invited to attend. The partners in the Fur Trade are, moreover, allowed no representative at the company's house in London. An annual dispatch, bearing the signatures of the Board, and treating of the different matters of interest then pending in connection with the company's affairs, is addressed each year to the council of the Northern Department, and is answered by its president. But this constitutes the sole occasion in which the company as a body approaches the Fur Trade as a body in the whole course of their business. On the other hand, the Board in London has a special representative in the Fur Trade in the person of the Governor-in-chief. He is president of all councils of officers held in the country, and there is no instance of his being outvoted by any such body.

Under these circumstances it is scarcely to be wondered at that an occasional murmur arises from the partners in the Fur Trade, when a series of unfortunate years has brought them but little remuneration. Still, upon the whole, the relations of the two bodies are harmonious, and the wintering partner is well paid for his labor. With the exception of personal clothing the company furnishes everything, even to the paid clerk and the men under him.

The partners in the Fur Trade hold their rights as a body, with respect to the stockholders of the company, in virtue of a deed-poll, dated 1834, under which the commissions to individuals are issued. These commissions, held from the company, entitle the officers holding them to their share in the profits and all the other privileges they enjoy.*

The vast operations of the company, extending over so great an extent of territory, with establishments remotely connected, and at times only accessible by the accident of favorable stages of water, demand an army of employés, in each of whom the prosecution of its peculiar business necessitates certain well-defined mental and physical characteristics, and a rigid training in the duties pertaining to his situation. No mere neophyte assumes even a minor command in the company's affairs; and the fortunate winner of a higher station must invariably be well qualified for his place by long identification with its active duties as well as traditions. Although itself an entirely English corporation, its officers in the fur

* For most of the information contained in the foregoing pages of this chapter, the author is indebted to the valuable work on "Red River," by J. J. Hargrave, F. R. G. S.

country are nearly all natives of Scotland and the Orkneys. More than one consideration, probably, contributed its weight in the selection of this nationality as its working representatives, viz., their proverbial shrewdness and propensity for barter; their generally vigorous physique and love of adventurous life; a steady perseverance in the attainment of an end; close economy, and the giving and receiving of the last half-penny in trade; and, above all, a certain Presbyterian honesty begotten of the Established Kirk.

Successful applicants for place in the company's service—a service highly esteemed and much sought after in "placing," the youth of the well-to-do Scotch *bourgeoise*—are enlisted invariably at an early age—generally from sixteen to eighteen—having first passed a rigid scrutiny as regards educational attainments, moral character, and, above all, physical build; and having, moreover, tendered such letters of recommendation as could not well fail of success. The nominal term of enlistment is five years, although the more direct understanding is that the applicant shall devote his life to the trade—an event which happens in nearly every instance, the style of living being calculated to unfit him for active duty in any other vocation. With the arrival of the annual requisition for additional help from the fur country, the accepted applicant is notified to hold himself in readiness, and sails for York Factory, on the Bay coast, by return packet. With his departure his salary begins. The magnificent sum of £20 per annum is his, together with rations, quarters, etc., and personal clothing from the company's shops at cost and ten

per cent. As this latter expenditure is the only one he is obliged to make, or, indeed, can well be tempted to indulge in, the bulk of his yearly stipend remains from year to year in the hands of his employer at compound interest.

Arrived at York Factory, he is generally sent to pass the first five or ten years of his apprenticeship in the extreme northern districts of Mackenzie River and Athabaska. This is done that he may at once be cut off from anything having a tendency to distract him from his duties; in order, also, to be drilled in the practical working of the Indian trade; and because of an established rule in the service which starts the apprentice at isolated posts in remote districts, bringing him up finally in the great depot forts on the borders of civilization, thus acquainting him with every duty pertinent to the trade. The occupations of his first years are those of salesman behind the counter in the trading-shop, and an occasional trip with the half-breed traders attached to the post to the various Indian camps in the vicinity for the barter of goods for peltries. The cultivation of the Spartan virtue of truth also obtains, no misrepresentations being permitted in order to effect sales in that service. In the discharge of such minor duties a few years glide uneventfully away, and the next advancement brings him to the accountant's office.

Upon the assumption of this position he passes in the race for promotion another class of apprentices, probably enlisted at the same date as himself, known as "postmasters." These are generally natives of the country, half-breeds of the better class for the most part, yet lacking the requisite education to

successfully compete with the Scotch importations. They are older men, as a rule, and are assigned the duty of superintending the laboring men, of whom each post has its complement, and have, in fact, a general supervision of the rougher details of the trade; but are entitled, nevertheless, to the title of company's gentlemen, as distinguishing them from the lower order of employés entirely outside the line of promotion. The advancement of a postmaster is necessarily slow, and they seldom attain a position higher than that of clerk in charge of a small post, although instances are on record where high place has been reached, and filled with much credit and pecuniary profit.

At the accountant's desk the apprentice—now known as a clerk—remains generally until fourteen years of service have elapsed, unless placed in charge of a fort, other than a depot, as chief clerk. During this period he has been, in most instances, gradually nearing the great forts forming the depots of supplies and forwarding, or the headquarters of a district, by a series of transfers from the unimportant and remote posts whence he started to those still larger and more contiguous to the desired centre. His salary, too, has increased from £20 to £100. He has lived entirely in the mess-rooms of the posts at which he resided; his associations have been with his elders and superiors in the ranks of the service; his conversation for years has been for the most part upon subjects relative to the trade; its traditions have become familiar to him, its routine almost a second nature; his habits of life are fixed, and sit so easily upon him as to suggest no desire

for change; in short, he has fallen so completely into the groove, become so much a part of the machinery of the trade, and so totally unacquainted with the requirements of any other business, as to render a change both impolitic and impossible. His ambition points but one way—to a higher rank in the service he has chosen. He pictures to himself, doubtless, in a vague and misty way, a certain far-off day when, with the accumulations of years, he will return to the world; never thinking that the world he will find will prove so strange and *bizarre* that a cursory glance will frighten him back to his solitudes again.

At the expiration of fourteen years of service, if a vacancy occur, the clerk steps from the ranks of salaried employés into the partnership of the Fur Trade, and assumes the title of chief trader. Upon the assumption of this dignity, in place of a yearly stipend, his emoluments take the form of a *pro rata* of the annual profits of the trade, and he is appointed to the command of some important post. Here his duties are a general oversight of the business immediately connected with the establishment and vicinity. The thorough practical knowledge of all the petty details of the business, acquired in the years of his previous service, enable him to judge of their correct performance by those now under him. He has now, also, an opportunity of devising new methods of increasing the trade, of developing pet projects previously conceived, and of adding proportionately to his own share of profit. The field opened before him is sufficiently wide for the employment of all his energies, and the desire to rival his compeers is necessarily

strong. He still retains in his new position the usual allowances of food, quarters, etc., from the company, as in the days of his clerkship; but the feeling that his pecuniary emoluments in a measure depend upon his own energies, adds new life and vigor to his movements. He becomes alert, restless, active, and indulges in much speculation relative to the increase of trade, until death or retirement opens the way for entrance into the ranks of chief factors—the highest class of officials known to the service.

In the exercise of the functions of this office he assumes control of a district—in many instances as large as a European kingdom—with headquarters at the largest fort within its limits, and a general supervision over all other posts. He directs the course of trade, erects new establishments, orders the necessary outfits for the year, suggests needed reforms to the council, and in his capacity as chief magistrate of his principality, rules supreme. He has attained the summit of the ladder, with the exception perhaps of governorship, and can rest secure. The accumulations of many years, which he has had little opportunity of spending, have by this time placed him beyond the reach of pecuniary care, and he finally resigns upon half pay, to visit the scenes of his youth for a season, then to return and pass the remainder of his days in the far settlements of the isolated country where his life has been spent.

As a man, the wintering partner is eminently social, and given to a generous hospitality. His years of isolation have only served to render him the more gregarious when opportunity presents. He throws his doors open to the congenial

stranger, setting apart a room for his use, ordering an additional cover at table, giving instructions to the groom relative to the free use of the favorite cob by his temporary guest, and considering all the honor as done to himself. Physically robust, he delights in athletic sports, in pedestrian excursions, in boating, in equestrian feats, and, when occasion presents, in prolonged convivialities with his old associates. As a family man, he is exemplary. It has happened that, rendered lonesome by his isolated position and cut off from society, in the days of his clerkship he has petitioned the Governor for the privilege of marriage ; and, gaining consent, has taken to wife a daughter of the land. If matrimonial desire has overtaken him further on, however, and when more advanced in rank and means, he has probably ordered a wife from the House in London, and having received her by return packet, married out of hand. And to the credit of the wintering partner be it said, that he generally becomes a model Benedict, although, in some instances, had he been personally present, his selection would have been different. We recall a case of this kind, where the party having received and married his wife, receipted to the House for her something in this style : "Received one wife in fair condition. Hope she will prove good, though she is certainly a very rum one to look at !"

Generally speaking, Manitoba is selected as a place of residence by servants of the company who have passed their lives in the service. Many of the officers, whose desire to return to their native country has withered through lapse of time and the influence of family ties formed in the country, have bought

land and settled down on it for life, forming among themselves the aristocracy of the wilderness. Owning the handsomest residences in the province, social by nature, and supplied with abundant means, they are given to a generous hospitality. The latch-string is always out to the stranger, and they delight in meeting upon each other's hearthstones and recounting the wild life of the past.

Such are the relations of master and man in the company's service, and the routine order of advancement which obtains in every instance. And had the territories of the company continued as isolated and inaccessible as they have been hitherto regarded, there is no reason to doubt that the *statu quo* of employed and employer would have remained unchanged till the end of the chapter. It has happened, however, that the transfer of the country to Canada, at the beginning of the present decade, has attracted a considerable tide of immigration to the new Province of Manitoba, and on up the fertile belt of the Saskatchewan. And while the northern part of North America is still as much in the possession of the company as ever, yet the rapid settlement and development of the southern borders of the territory, and the consequent opportunities for speculation and high wages, have served to dissipate the quiet content of the company's officers. Within the last decade some of them have left the service and engaged with free fur-trading firms, prosecuting business in opposition to the company, or have carried on the fur-trade on their own account. Especially has this been the case with the salaried clerks, upon whom the company rely to fill the

vacancies in the Fur Trade. The factors and traders still retain their positions from the fact of receiving their pay from the profits of the whole trade, which, in the aggregate, make up a higher salary than they could hope to obtain elsewhere. The average income of the two ranks of officers in the Fur Trade is, for a trader $2,500, and for a factor $5,000, always including in addition the support of himself and family. Place this sum at compound interest annually, and the rapidity with which it accumulates will be readily seen. Half pay is only given for a term of five years after leaving the service.

With the clerk of five or ten years' standing, however, it is different. He could expect for years only a nominal annual salary, the equal of which he can command for one or two months' labor under the new order of things, if once free from the service. His prospects of accumulating a competency for the future, outside the ranks of the company, though not so absolutely certain as within, are yet sufficiently promising ; so he leaves. Under this condition of things, the company find themselves driven to alter, in some measure, their time-honored programme, and increase the annual stipends of clerks and apprentices to a nearer approximation with salaries paid that class in civilized life. Clerks who have withdrawn from the service are invited to return under new rates, the regular line of promotion being preserved as before.

The extent of territory over which the Hudson's Bay Company carries on its trade, and throughout which depots and forts are established, is very great. As the crow flies, the distance between Fort Vancouver, on the Oregon, and Fort

Confidence, on Bear Lake, exceeds 1350 geographical miles, and the space between the company's posts on the Labrador coast, or their station at Sault Ste. Marie, and Fort Simpson, on the Pacific, measures more than 2500 miles. The area of country under its immediate influence is about four and a half million square miles, or more than one-third greater than the whole extent of Europe. This vast hunting country is everywhere sprinkled over with lakes, and in all directions intersected by rivers and lesser streams, abounding with edible fish. East of the Rocky Mountains are vast prairies over which roams the bison, lord of the plains ; while west of these mountains the land in densely timbered. The most northerly station, east of the Rocky Mountains, is on the Mackenzie River, within the Arctic circle ; so terribly intense is the cold at this point that axes tempered specially can alone be used for cutting and splitting wood, ordinary hatchets breaking as though made of glass. West of the Rockies, the most northernly station is Fort Simpson, situated near the Sitka River, the boundary between Alaska and British Columbia. Throughout this vast extent of territory, a regular communication is kept up between the Governor and the numerous scattered posts, and supplies are forwarded to all the districts with a regularity and exactness truly wonderful.

The chartered territories and circuit of commercial relations of the Hudson's Bay Company are divided into vast sections, named the Northern, Southern, Montreal and Western departments. Of these the Northern department is situated between Hudson's Bay and the Rocky Mountains ; the South-

ern, between James' Bay and Canada, comprehending, also, East Main, on the eastern coast of Hudson's Bay. The Montreal department comprehends the extent of the business in the Canadas, while the Western comprises the regions west from the Rocky Mountains. The depots to which supplies from the civilized world are periodically sent, and which form the keys of these various sections, are York Factory, in the Northern department ; Moose Factory, in the Southern ; Montreal, in the Canadas, and Victoria, Vancouver's Island, in the West. In the Northern department, which includes the grand bulk of the chartered territories, in which alone, until recently, the burden of government fell upon the company, the most important interests of the business are concentrated. Its vast extent necessitates a depot for the " inland districts," which exists at Norway House, on Lake Winnipeg ; and many causes have combined to render Fort Garry, in which are stored the goods passing over the United States route, the centre of business, and a large depot for the " plain districts." It is also the residence of the Governor-in-chief, and the headquarters of the civil service of the company, while York Factory, on Hudson's Bay, is the headquarters of the accountants' department.

These four departments are again divided into smaller portions called districts, of which there are fifty-three, and each of which is under the direction of a superintending officer. These again are sub-divided into one hundred and fifty-two minor establishments, forts, posts, and outposts. There is connected with each district a depot to which all the supplies

for the district are forwarded periodically, and to which all the furs and produce from the forts are sent to be shipped to England. Some of the depot forts have a complement of thirty or forty men, mechanics, laborers, servants, etc.; but most of them have only ten, five, four, or even two, besides the superintending officer. As in most instances a space of forest or plain, varying from fifty to three hundred miles in length, intervenes between each of these establishments, and the inhabitants have only the society of each other, some idea may be formed of the solitary lives led by many of the company's servants. But every man knows his place and his work; the laws regulating their duties are clearly defined and well understood, and are enforced with a strictness and rigor truly military or naval. Hence the harmonious working of the whole extensive and complicated machinery, and the wonderful financial results of its operations.

The term fort, as applied to the trading-posts of the Fur Land, is strictly applicable to but two; most of them do not merit the name. The only two in the country that are real, *bona-fide* forts, are Upper and Lower Fort Garry, in the Province of Manitoba. The others are merely half-a-dozen frame buildings defended by wooden pickets or stockades; and a few, where the Indians are quiet and harmless, are entirely destitute of defence of any kind. Upper Fort Garry, as the residence of the Governor, and the central post of the Northern department, may be considered the most important fort of the company. Its business consists of trading goods for cash, furs, or country produce; of forwarding the

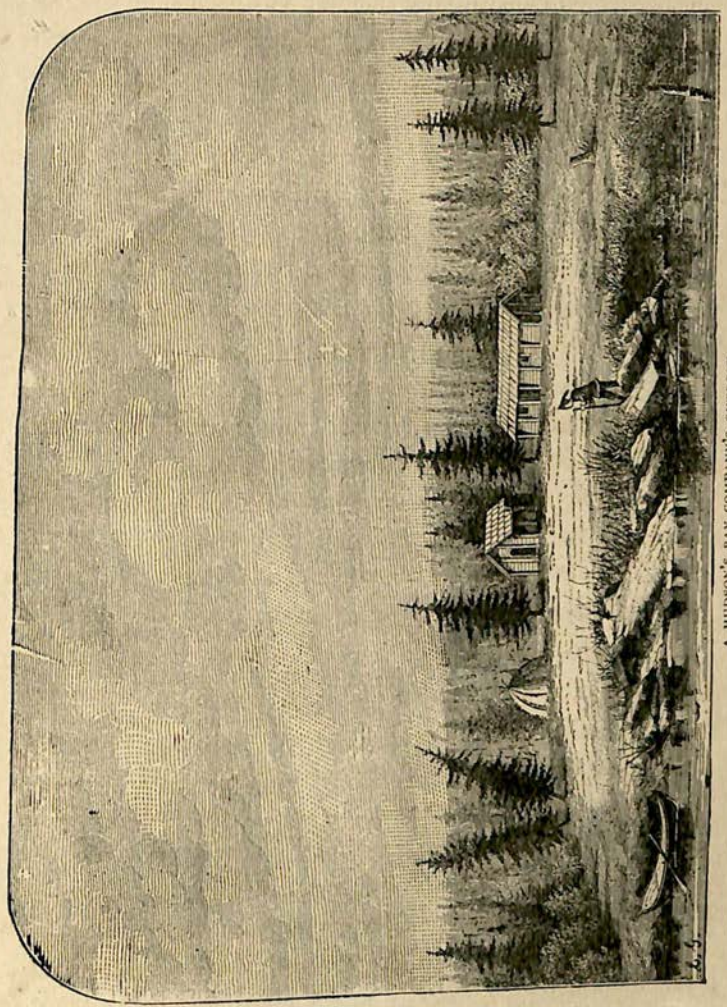
supplies for certain large districts to their destination in the interior, and of banking and transacting a variety of business with the inhabitants of the settlement round about. The means by which these affairs are carried on consist of a bonded warehouse, a sale-shop, a general office, and sundry stores for pemmican and other articles of a special nature. Each of these departments is furnished with its staff of clerks, warehouse-men and laborers.

Lower Fort Garry, more commonly called the Stone Fort, in allusion to the material of which its houses are constructed, is perhaps a better sample of the larger posts of the company than any within the ordinary range of travel. It is situated on the west bank of the Red River of the North, about twenty miles from the foot of Lake Winnipeg. The banks in this locality are very high, and, in consequence, the fort is favorably situated for the avoidance of floods during periods of inundation, by no means of infrequent occurrence. The business of the establishment, which is one of the subordinate posts of the Red River district, consists of farming, retail dealing, and boat-freighting. At this post, during the summer months, boat-brigades are outfitted for the trip to York Factory and other posts inland. The buildings consist of officers' and servants' dwellings, shops and stores. These are all inclosed within a stone wall, embracing an area of about one and a half acre, and pierced through its entire circuit with a tier of loop-holes.

Entering through the huge gateway pierced in the centre

of the east wall, facing the river, the first view is of the residence of the chief trader in command, and also of the clerks and upper class of employés under his charge. It is a long two-story stone building, with a broad piazza encircling it on three sides. A square plot of green sward surrounding it is fenced in with neat railing, and kept in extremely good order. A broad gravel walk leads from the gateway to the piazza. Huge shade trees border it, and beds of waving and fragrant flowers load the business air with their perfume. In this building the mess of the chief and his subordinates is held. Its hospitalities are extended in good old English style. A room is set apart for the use of the transient guest, who is free to come and go as he lists.

With the exception of the residence of the chief trader in charge, the buildings of the fort follow the course of the walls, and, facing inward, form a hollow square. Following this order, immediately at the left of the gateway is the trading-store, devoted solely to the sale of goods. A large stone structure of three stories, it has within its walls nearly every article used in that climate. The sales-room is a square apartment, with no attempt at ornament, no plaster, the ceiling merely the joists and flooring of the second flat, thickly studded with nails and hooks, from which are suspended various articles of trade. Along the side walls are box shelves, nearly two feet deep. On the floor within the counter are piled bales of goods, bundles of prints, hardware, etc.; and this space within the counter comprises almost the entire room. A small area is railed off near the door, suffi-



A HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY'S OUTPOST.

ciently large to hold twenty standing customers. When this is filled, the remaining patrons must await their turn in the courtyard; and it is not at all an unusual sight to see from fifty to one hundred people standing quietly about outside until their time comes to be served. The best goods of all manufactures alone are sold here. No shoddy or inferior goods are ever imported or sold by the company. Everything is purchased direct from producers, and of a stipulated quality. The principal articles of trade are tea, sugar, calico, blankets, ammunition, fishing-gear, and a kind of cloth, very thick and resembling blanketing, called duffle. Coffee is rarely sold, and green tea is almost unknown, the black only being used. Raw spirits are sold to a large extent in the posts immediately contiguous to settlements. In former times the sale of this latter article was permitted only upon two days of the year. On Christmas and the Queen's birthday each head of a family was permitted to purchase from the stores of the company, upon an order countersigned by the Governor, one pint of spirits. In the event of spirits being required for medicinal purposes, the signature of both Governor and attending physician were necessary.

Amidst this stock of merchandise, composed in so great a part of staple articles, may be found, nevertheless, an assortment of dress goods and gewgaws over a century old—old-time ruffs, stomachers, caps and what not; garments of antique cut and trim, articles of *vertu*, and apparel long since out of vogue are mixed up in a heterogeneous mass. What a day of delights and surprises would it prove to the ladies

of the present age to toss and tumble all that collection of decayed finery! Yet, doubtless, much would be found *à propos* to the reigning fashions; for here, too, may be purchased the latest styles of wear upon Cheapside and Regent's Park —kid gloves at fabulously low prices; made-up silks, Parisian bonnets, delicate foot gear, etc., with near neighbors of huge iron pots, copper cauldrons, and iron implements of grim aspect and indefinite weight, together with ships' cordage, oakum, pitch, and other marine necessities. Over this dispensary of needfuls and luxuries presides an accountant and two clerks, none of them gotten up in the elaborate costumes of the counter-waiters of civilization, but rather affecting buckskin coats, corduroy trousers, and the loudest styles of flannel shirts. Here all the multitudinous accounts of the fort are kept, a statement forwarded quarterly to the chief post of the district, and from thence sent to the company's great house in Fenchurch street, London.

In the store there is no such thing known as exhibiting goods with a view of increasing the purchases of a probable customer. Whatever is asked for is produced, and, being paid for, the customer is ignored at once; his room is evidently better than his company. There is, however, no need to urge the majority of its patrons to purchase. The nomadic half-breed or Indian brings his money, or whatever he may have to exchange, wrapped carefully in a handkerchief, places it upon the counter and begins to trade. First, he purchases what he absolutely needs; then, whatever he sees—candy, chewing-gum, fancy ties—in short, anything that tastes sweet

or looks flashy. When all is spent, to the last half-penny, he trudges off with his happy wife—his invariable companion when shopping—quite contentedly, although probably in doubt where his next meal is to come from.*

The currency with which business was transacted, until quite recently, consisted chiefly of promissory notes, issued by the company, redeemable by bills of exchange granted at sixty days' sight on the Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee in London. The notes were, however, readily redeemed in coin at Fort Garry, without deduction for discount, whenever presented; and being more easily carried than coin, bore a corresponding value in the eyes of the inhabitants of the territory. It is reported that General Pope, when resident on duty as an officer of engineers, many years ago, at Pembina, having observed the preference evinced by the settlers for the company's notes, more than for American gold, actually instanced it to the Government as a symptom of the degraded state of ignorance in which the unhappy colonists were kept by the Hudson's Bay Company. The notes are about the size of a half-sheet of letter paper, and are of three denominations—one pound sterling, five shillings sterling and one shilling sterling. Besides these, however, there is a good deal of English and American gold and silver coin in circulation in the country.

Leaving the trading-store, a succession of warehouses containing stores and supplies, is next encountered. The last

* The aspect of Lower Fort Garry, as well as the character of the business transacted there, has undergone considerable modification within the last decade.

and most massive building, near the gateway, is the warehouse of packages destined for posts inland. These are goods imported from England and other countries, and to be used in the fur-trade exclusively. In this vast bulk of merchandise there is not a single package of over one hundred pounds weight. The greater portion weigh but eighty or ninety pounds, strongly packed, the cases lined with zinc and bound with iron. The packages are of this limited weight from the necessity of "portaging" them from river to river, sometimes a long distance, upon the shoulders of boatmen; and they must be strong in order to insure safe transport over a thousand or more miles of rough travel. Twice annually this warehouse is emptied by the departure of the boat-brigades for the interior, and as often replenished by shipment from England. Summer is the busy season, as then all the freighting is carried on, and the accounts for the year closed. It is also a time of much bustle, created by the constant arrivals and departures which take place at so central a point as Fort Garry, in a country where locomotion may be called the normal condition of the majority of the people during the summer months.

The wall surrounding the fort is about twelve feet high, and flanked by two-story bastions or turrets at each corner. In the centre of the inclosure rises an immense double flagstaff, bearing the flag of the company, with its strange design, and still stranger motto, "*Pro pelle cutem*"—skin for skin. Near by stands the bell tower, at the signal of whose tones work begins and ends. When it announces the dinner hour

the trading-store is closed, and the customers are turned out to await the return of the clerks.

Outside the walls of the fort, but belonging to it, is situated a miniature village of many and varied industries. In neat dwellings reside the heads of the different departments of what may be termed the outdoor business of the company. Here dwells the chief engineer of all the steam power in use upon its ships, boats, mills, etc. Here also lives the farmer who directs the cultivation of the immense agricultural farm connected with the fort; the herdsman, who superintends the rearing and care of the droves of cattle, horses and other stock of the corporation; the miller in charge of the milling interests; the shipwright, who directs the building, launching and refitting of the company's fleet. In the rear of these dwellings are mess-rooms for the accommodation of the workmen and the residences of the different overseers. Separate a little stand the flouring-mills, brewery, ship-yards, machine shops, etc., all supplied with the latest labor-saving machinery. Scattered along the bank of the river lie moored or drawn up on the beach the miniature navy of the company; here a lake steamer, there river steamboats, then schooners, yachts and a whole school of whale boats, with one mast, unstepped at will, and of three and a half tons burden, used in the freighting service, and requiring nine men as crew. Drawn upon the beach lie birch-bark canoes of all sizes and conditions, from the little one of a single passenger capacity to the long dispatch boat requiring thirteen navigators. The steam vessels are mostly manned by Americans; the sailing

craft by the Orkney servants of the company, and the whale-boats by the native half-breeds. The birch-bark canoe is the Indian's buggy. One or two steam-tugs whistle and puff rapidly up and down the stream, towing rafts of lumber, boats laden with limestone, fire-wood, etc. The remaining surroundings of the fort are made up of a well kept vegetable garden, extensive stock corrals and a large farm under perfect cultivation.

At a distance of some twenty miles, at the foot of Lake Winnipeg, among the marshes and lowlands, are the cattle ranches of the company. There the stock is herded during the summer and housed in winter, being only driven to the uplands during the spring and fall freshets. The generally high price of cattle makes stock-raising extremely profitable, and the wandering life attendant upon their care is particularly suited to the native herdsmen. The stock is collected every spring and branded, and such a number selected as may be required for work purposes during the summer months. Oxen are used for freighting to a large extent; trains of several hundred, harnessed singly in carts, crossing the prairies, being not an unusual sight. The majority of the large forts in the Southern country have their stockyards and farms, and the amount of wealth accumulated in this way is enormous.

The business transacted at the Stone Fort, if we except freighting and some minor details of the fur-trade, may be presented as a fair sample of that carried on at the majority of the large posts contiguous to settlements; and its archi-

tecture and surroundings, if wood be substituted for stone, identically the same. But the great depot posts in the North are of another character, and of one we wish to speak.

Churchill Factory is situated about five miles from Hudson's Bay, upon a small bay on the Churchill River, and above it, extending a distance of seven miles, to the lower rapids, is a large marsh. The factory receives its supplies once a year from a vessel which arrives in the latter part of August or early in September, and starts back upon her homeward voyage after a delay of about ten days, the severity of the climate rendering it imprudent to make a longer stay. By the middle of November the Churchill is enchained in ice, on which even the spring tides, though they rise ten or twelve feet above the ordinary level, have no effect. Not till the middle of June does the sun, getting the mastery of the frost, compel it to release its hold and let the river flow on its course. By the middle of October the marshes and swamps are frozen over, and the earth covered with snow. By the latter end of December snow covers the stockade which surrounds the factory from six to ten feet deep. Through this mass pathways about five feet in width are cut. Late in April the snow begins to melt away. From the end of October to the end of April, it is possible to walk only upon snow-shoes.

In such a climate, much of what is done by the white inhabitants has a direct reference to their self-preservation. Before annual supplies of coal were forwarded from England, all the fuel that could be collected in the neighborhood of the

factory was barely sufficient to supply a single fire in the morning and evening. During the remainder of the day the only recourse of the company's servants, when the weather was bad, was to walk in the guard-room under the protection of heavy coats of fur. By a stroke of ingenuity ice was turned into a means of protection against the piercing cold. The interior walls of the house were covered with water, which froze into solid ice. This lining was found to hold firm until the general thaw of spring came. In the intensity of frost, rocks, into the crevices of which water has run, split with a report resembling that of a gun. Everywhere they are punctured and riven from the effects of freezing water.

The return of spring and summer, after a long, gloomy winter, in this region, is like an awakening to a new life. The welcome change is thoroughly enjoyed. Summer treads so closely upon the heels of winter as scarcely to leave any standing ground for spring. One of the great drawbacks to the enjoyment of the summer consists in the myriads of mosquitoes that fill the air, and give the weary dwellers no rest day or night. They crowd in such numbers at Churchill Factory as to appear to crush one another to death; and the victims are sometimes in such piles that they have to be swept out twice every day. Nothing but a northeast wind, carrying the chill from the ice over which it has passed, gives relief from these tormentors. As a cure for mosquito bites, the natives anoint themselves with sturgeon oil—an effective remedy, but one requiring to be often applied. Nor is man alone the only victim of these insects. They prey equally

upon animals of various kinds; even the feathered tribe, so far from being safe, suffer about the neck and eyes. No permanent relief can be expected until the chilly nights of September set in. In this month the sandflies and midges are innumerable, the latter insinuating themselves all over the body, the clothes affording no adequate protection. These insect plagues cease their torments at sunset, and they disappear entirely in October. However the fact may be accounted for, all these pests become more numerous the farther one goes north. In the swamps, where they are most numerous, they make the dogs howl, roll on the ground and rush into the water. The fox shows his restlessness by barking and snapping about, and when inclination would suggest his going after birds' nests, he is compelled to seek shelter in his burrow. If the chief business of the company's servants in winter is to struggle for existence against the cold, in the summer an equally fierce contest takes place against mosquitoes, sandflies and the overpowering heat.

Widely different from the great depot forts, however, are the trading-posts of the company—quaint-looking places constructed according to a uniform type. Built generally upon the second or lower bank of a river or lake, though sometimes perched upon the loftier outer banks, a trading-fort is invariably a square or oblong, enclosed by immense trees or pickets, one end sunk deeply in the ground, and placed close together. In the prairie country this defence is stout and lofty, but in the wooded region it is frequently dispensed with altogether. A platform, about the ordinary height of a man,

is carried along inside the square, so as to enable any one to peep over without being in danger from arrow or bullet. The entrance is closed by two massive gates, an inner and an outer one, and all the houses of the chief trader and his men, the trading-store, fur-room and warehouses are within the square —the former always standing in the middle, the latter ranged about the walls, facing inward. At the four corners of the palisade are bastions, generally two stories high, pierced with embrasures, to delude the Indians into the belief that cannon are there, and intended to strike terror into any red-skinned rebel daring to dispute the supremacy of the company.

The trade-room, or, as it is more frequently called, the Indian-shop, at an interior trading-post, bears a close resemblance to the store of civilization. It contains every imaginable commodity likely to be required by the Indian. Upon its shelves are piled bales of cloth of all colors, capotes, blankets, etc.; in smaller divisions are placed balls of twine, scalping-knives, gun flints, fire-steels, files, gun-screws, canoe-awls, and glass beads of all colors, sizes and descriptions. Drawers under the counter contain fish-hooks, needles, scissors, thimbles, red and yellow ochre and vermilion for painting faces and canoes. Upon the floor is strewn an assortment of tin and copper kettles, ranging in capacity from a pint to half a gallon. In the corners of the room stand trading-guns, kegs of powder and boxes of balls, while from the ceiling depend other articles of trade.

In many of the forts the trade-room is cleverly contrived to prevent a sudden rush of Indians, the approach from out-

side the pickets being through a long, narrow passage only of sufficient width to admit a single Indian at a time, and bent at an acute angle at the window where the trader stands. This precaution is rendered necessary by the frantic desire which sometimes seizes the Indian to shoot the trader.

Time moves slowly at many of these isolated trading-posts and change is almost unknown. To-day they are the same as they were one hundred years ago. The requisition for the goods of this year contain precisely the same articles as that of a century since. The Indian trapper still brings his marten and musquash, and his wants are still strouds, cottons, beads, and trading-guns. The sun-dial, placed in the open courtyard three generations ago, has apparently changed no more than the great luminary whose course it marks. Only outside the walls, where a rude cross or wooden railing, blown over by the tempest, discolored by rain and snow-drift, marks the lonely resting-place of the dead, does the roll of the passing years leave its trace.

Until a comparatively recent date the system of trading at all the company's posts was entirely one of barter, money values being unknown. Latterly, however, the all-potent dollar is becoming a recognized medium of exchange, especially at the forts nearest the borders of civilization; but the standard of values throughout all the territories of the company is still the beaver-skin, by which the prices of all other furs are governed. Every service rendered, or purchase made, is paid for in skins, the beaver being the unit of computation.

The collection of fur skins throughout the company's territory is made during the autumn and winter months at the different trading-posts; the summer season being occupied in transporting goods to the various districts, the concentration of furs at the depots, and the collection of a sufficient supply of provisions to last over winter. The latter consist in the plain districts of pemmican—dried buffalo meat mingled with fat—and flour; in the wood districts of fish and dried moose and reindeer-meat. A winter very rarely passes at the more isolated forts, however, without the little garrison being reduced to very short allowance, often being obliged to kill their horses to maintain life.

The life of the company's servants is a hard one in many respects, yet it seems admirably suited to the daring men, who have shown a patient endurance of every hardship and privation in the fur-trade. Indeed, no other branch of commerce has tended more to bring out man's energy and courage. To the pursuit of fur may be traced the sources from which the knowledge of three-fourths of the continent of North America has been derived.

CHAPTER V.

LIFE IN A HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY'S FORT.

THE people resident in a Hudson's Bay Company's post form a community of themselves, more or less gregarious, as the establishment is designed for trading purposes, a depot of supplies, or merely an isolated stockade for the accumulation of provisions for the use of the larger forts. But, of whatever character the place may be a regular business-routine, demanding certain times for the performance of special duties, is strictly observed. This routine, which at certain seasons of the year degenerates into the merest formality, there being literally nothing to do, is the great preventive of physical and mental rust among the inhabitants, and an antidote for that listless apathy which would certainly obtain were no defined rules of action and employment followed. Every member of the community, from the factor or clerk in charge to the cook, is expected to be, and almost invariably is, at his post of duty at the times designated for its especial performance. And wherever this rule of action is followed, it is wonderful what a multitude of affairs constantly develop to demand attention, and what an amount of the smaller details of business may be thoroughly cared for.

From this system come the close economy with which the

affairs of the company are conducted, and the perfect understanding of the petty details of every branch of its business on the part of its employés. This is augmented in a great measure, of course, by the assignment of certain persons to the performance of particular duties, and their retention in that position for a term of years, enabling each incumbent to gain a thorough knowledge of the requirements of his place. For example, a clerk in the service, in the great majority of instances, must remain a simple clerk for a term of fourteen years before he is even considered as being in the line of promotion. During these long years of service he must, perforce, gain a thorough practical knowledge of the duties, and even of the most trivial details, relating to his station. From long custom he falls into the beaten channels of the trade, its manner of executing business details, and identifies himself with its traditions. So, when he assumes charge of a post or district, he carries with him, to assist in the discharge of his new responsibilities, that punctuality, adherence to routine, and careful regard for the little things of his position, which he has so well learned in his apprenticeship. These characteristics are of such a nature as to develop a sufficient amount of employment for the chief officer of a post even in the dullest times.

The real life of the fort, then, consisting for the most part of mere routine, may be said to begin at the breakfast-hour, which is as regularly appointed as those for the dispatch of business. The breakfast-time with the lower class of employés, the nature of whose duties demands early rising, is

about six o'clock in the winter and five in the summer seasons. These servants mess by themselves, drawing rations at regular intervals through a steward, much after the fashion of army-life. A cook is appointed from their number, who performs that duty alone, and who is responsible for the provisions, quantity and quality of food, etc. A short season, generally devoted to pipe-smoking, is allowed after each meal, when they separate to their various duties.

At the officers' mess, over which the trader or factor in charge of the post presides, and which is located in the building he occupies, assemble the family of that official, the clerks and apprentices of every grade who are entitled to the name of "company's gentlemen," and the stranger temporarily within the gates. In conformity with the system of early hours prevalent in the country, breakfast with this mess takes place at half-past seven or eight o'clock at different seasons, dinner at two, and supper at six in the evening. It is at these hours that the social life of the day may be said to transpire. Here the limited budget of local and foreign news is discussed. Whatever of wit and humor may have occurred to the minds of its members during the day is carefully treasured up to be gotten off with appropriate effect amid the genial surroundings and mellowing influences of meal-time sociality. Should the chance gleam of humor happen to be upon some subject foreign to the discourse in hand, the conversation is adroitly trained into the desired channel to afford an occasion for its opportune delivery; for a gleam of humor is too precious a thing to be lightly thrown away.

The conversation, however, hinges for the most part, from the very nature of their isolated position, upon local subjects, connected more or less remotely with the trade. The success of Pierre's last venture with an outfit of goods traded at some Indian camp; the quantity of fish or pemmican procured by Sandy at his provision-stockade; the amount of goods needed for the season's trade, etc., form staple and interesting topics of discourse and comment. The habit soon forms of making the most of these meagre subjects, until quite a degree of enthusiasm can be readily excited about really trivial matters. Not that the mental scope of the mess-table is necessarily limited to trivialities, but that subjects of discussion requiring any profundity of thought present themselves infrequently. The habit, too, of close attention to mere details tends to draw thought in that direction, to the exclusion of more general matters.

The comparative monotony of the mess-room, which obtains from the meagreness of the conditions of its isolated life, and from the long and perfect intimacy of those composing its social circle, is, nevertheless, often broken by the advent of a stranger at the board. This stranger may be a passing official from another post in the service, or some wanderer who braves the discomforts of travel through those inhospitable regions from a traveler's curiosity. In either case he is equally a stranger to the mess-room, from the fact of the unusual budget of news he brings to add to the somewhat worn and threadbare stock of discourse already in hand. The arrival of such a personage is a matter of much bustle

and congratulation; and he receives a welcome which, while it has many of the elements of selfishness on the part of his entertainers, leaves nothing to be desired in its heartiness and cordiality. Indeed, he is likely to be wined and dined in good earnest so long as his budget of news holds out.

If he be a passing officer from another fort, the mess-table is made the occasion of a detailed and succinct account of the latest news at the date of his departure from his own establishment, together with that accumulated at the various mess-rooms at which he has halted on the way. As the intermarriages of the employés of the company have been productive of ties of consanguinity of various degrees of remoteness permeating the entire service, questions as to the welfare of a relative stationed, say, at an adjoining post, lead to a reply pertinent to the health of a whole army of relations scattered over a country reaching to the antipodes. The following up of this chain of connections, their healths, employments, stations, etc., naturally occupies considerable time, and keeps the new-comer in full tide of converse, and the mess-table interested listeners for long hours. In addition to news of this nature, he has his own autobiography since the time of their last meeting to relate; jokes to perpetrate over the escapades of present company of which he has heard; and, if he dwell nearer the confines of civilization than his hosts, the latest news from the outer world to communicate. All these topics of conversation are religiously reserved for discussion and revelation at the mess-table, that the entire community may profit by their dispensation.

At such times a more lively air pervades the mess-room, and a genial spirit of good-fellowship develops under the unusual excitement. Small *caches* of wine and spirits, hoarded away from the meagre annual allowance, make their appearance upon the board, and add to the hilarity of the occasion. Perhaps a few cigars, produced as a rare treat, find their way mysteriously into the room from some unknown chest in which they have laid buried for years. The genial glow of fellowship deepens with each succeeding gathering about the board, until the whole community feel its reviving influence. The long evenings of social intercourse are protracted far beyond their usual wont, and old memories are ruthlessly dragged forth to feed the fires of conversation should they show symptoms of abatement. Even long after the departure of the transient visitor, his sayings, the news he imparted, and the rollicking time of merriment he occasioned, furnish abundant matter of comment.

The arrival of a traveler from the outer world is, however, the great episode in the every-day life of the post. The community find in him an inexhaustible fount of enjoyment; and, if he be of a communicative disposition, his store of news and narrative will do service in payment of his weekly board-bill for an indefinite period. To such a one the hospitalities of the fort are extended in the most liberal manner. An apartment is assigned him for his sole occupancy during the period of his sojourn. He is free to come and go when and where he listeth, means of locomotion being furnished upon demand. The members of the community delight in explaining to him

any matters pertaining to their isolated life which may attract his attention, thereby affording an opportunity of conversation. His companionship is eagerly sought by all, and the fortunate individual who secures his preferred acquaintance excites at once the envy of less favored ones. Nothing is left undone to render his stay pleasant, and to prolong it to the utmost. When he finally takes his departure, he is sent upon his journey freighted with the good wishes of the isolated post, and certain of the same cordial treatment at his next stopping-place.

The mess-table has, too, other attractions than those of sociality, and of a more solidly substantial kind. The officers of the forts are all good livers, and, although accustomed to rough it on short allowances of food when necessity requires, take particular care that the home-larder shall be well stocked with all the delicacies and substantials afforded by the surrounding country. The viands are of necessity composed, in the greater part, of the wild game and fish with which the prairies and waters abound. But they are of the choicest kind, and selected from an abundant supply. One gets there the buffalo-hump—tender and juicy; the moose-nose—tremulous and opaque as a vegetable conserve; the finest and most savory waterfowl, and the freshest of fish—all preserved by the power of frost instead of salt. True, the supply of vegetables at many mess-tables is wofully deficient, and a continuous diet of wild meats, like most other things of eternal sameness, is apt to pall upon the appetite. But the list of meats is so extensive, and each requiring a particular mode of cook-

ing that a long time may elapse without a repetition of dishes. Then, too, the climate favors the consumption of solid food, and, after short residence, the appetite becomes seasoned to the quality of the fare obtainable. Bread, as an imported article, is in many instances regarded as quite in the character of a luxury; the few sacks of flour which constitute the annual allowance of each officer being hoarded away by the prudent housewife as carefully as the jams and preserves of her more fortunate sisters. In such cases it is batted into small cakes, one of which is placed beside each plate at meal-time; the size of the cake being so regulated as to afford a single one for each meal of the year. The more common vegetables, such as potatoes and turnips, can be successfully cultivated in some places, and, wherever this occurs, enter largely into the daily *menu*. Fruits, either fresh or dried, seldom make their appearance upon the table; lack of transportation, also, forbidding the importation of the canned article.

At many of the remote inland posts, however, the daily bill of fare is limited enough, and a winter season seldom passes without the garrison of some isolated station suffering extreme privation. At Jasper and Henry Houses, for example, the officers have been frequently forced to slaughter their horses in order to supplement the meagre supply of provisions. These posts are situated in the very heart of the Rocky Mountains, with the vast region marked "swampy" on the maps separating them from the depot forts. In many of the extreme Arctic stations the supply of provisions is

limited the year round to reindeer-meat, and fish, and not infrequently to the latter alone. Under these circumstances, no wonder that the company's officer comes to regard the possession of flour and sugar as among the most essential requisites of life.

As to the comforts of upholstery and furniture in the mess-room, and, indeed, throughout the entire establishment, but little attention is paid to it. The constantly-recurring changes of residence, occasioned by the necessities of their condition, render the officers of the company, as a class, somewhat careless about the accommodations afforded by their houses. At remote stations, the most simple articles of furniture are held to be sufficient, and shifts are made to adapt different objects to uses not contemplated by their makers. The strong, compact wooden trunks or traveling-cases used in the country, for example, often constitute the chief pieces of furniture—if we except, perhaps, a bedstead—and do duty as chairs, tables, and wardrobe. At the larger posts, however, and at the principal depot-stations, the residents are furnished with more of the appliances of civilization, and means exist whereby such as may be so inclined can render themselves very comfortable; more especially as changes of appointments occur less frequently at headquarters than elsewhere.

While it must be confessed that the main body of officers confine themselves in this regard to the practical and useful, yet it not infrequently happens that a gentleman of independent taste turns up who, animated by the desire of giving an

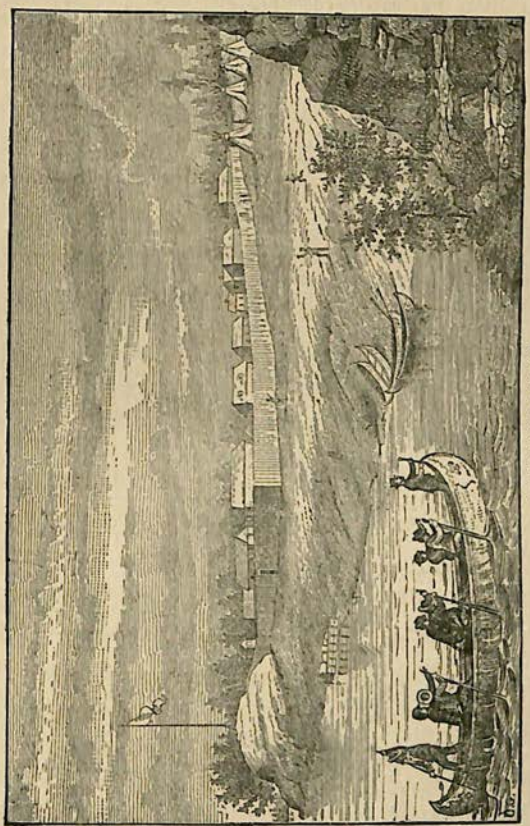
artistic air to his chamber, graces the useful with more or less of the ornamental. These peculiarities of individual taste betray themselves most strikingly in the selection and disposal of bedroom furniture. Brightly burnished arms, powder-flasks, and shot-pouches, are arranged in fantastic figures upon the walls. Objects of aboriginal handiwork in birch-bark, porcupine-quills, and beadwork, impart a certain barbaric splendor to the apartment; while in vivid contrast appear rude frames enclosing highly-colored lithographs of deeds of daring on the British turf, highways, and waters. Prize-fighters, swaying in fierce conflict, and surrounded by excited and applauding hundreds, may be seen in round the last; race-horses, flecked with foam and dirt, stretch away in the dim perspective in a neck-and-neck race toward a winning-post where an eager crowd of spectators stand with uplifted hands to welcome the favorite; wild huntsmen, with impossible dogs, and guns with crooked barrels, fire wildly toward the left and bring down myriads of birds at the right; and, to crown all, a red-and-yellow picture of Queen Victoria in the character of a female Neptune, seated on a solitary rock in mid-ocean and holding a pitchfork in her hand, occupies the post of honor, and is supposed to represent the omnipotent Britannia.

The business of the post, with the exception of the necessary employments of the lower servants, is transacted between the hours of nine in the morning and six in the evening, with an interval of an hour between two and three o'clock for dinner, when the offices and stores are closed. Generally speaking, this division of time holds good all the year round

though slight modifications take place with the changing seasons and periods when little work is done. During these hours of business there is much to be looked after, especially in the summer season. When the bell announces the opening of the fort-gates, the inclosure soon fills with Indians and traders, who besiege the counter of the trading-store, or lounge idly about the yard—picturesque vagabonds in motley attire. The few clerks in charge are busily engaged in measuring tea, sugar, ammunition, etc., into colored-cotton handkerchiefs unwrapped from greasy aboriginal heads for their reception; in examining furs and paying for them in instalments; in measuring off the scanty yards of blue-cotton prints that are to clothe the forms of dusky belles, or causing howls of delight by the exhibition of gilt jewelry to be sold at ten times its original cost.

Outside the stockade, the *voyageurs* are loading whale-boats, in the adjacent stream with bales of fur for transportation to depot-forts, or discharging cargoes of merchandise destined to wide-spread distribution. Over this process an accountant keeps careful watch, as he does over everything involving a representative value for which he will be held to account. All is bustle and activity; yet there is no haste. The careful attention to details exhibits itself in everything, and the minutest watch is kept over all.

As the day advances, the arrivals at the fort increase in number and importance. Ofttimes a large band of Indians ride rapidly up to the stockade, and, turning their ponies loose upon the prairie, enter upon the barter of small quan-



A PORTAGE LANDING.

tities of peltries to supply their immediate necessities. Again, the band will encamp about the stockade, trading the results of a long and successful hunt, and making the days and nights hideous with their heathenish festivities. Their camp-fires light up the plain round about with a fitful glare; their green-and-yellow-painted visages and blanket-attired forms assume at length a certain degree of individuality; and the more importunate beggars even become familiar objects to the sight; when suddenly they are gone, only to be replaced by others of a like description; for a company's fort is seldom free from its complement of chronic hangers-on. There is, too, much bustle created by the arrivals and departures of officials from other forts of the service, *en route* in charge of boat-brigades for distant points, who stop but for a few hours, and are off again. Should the season be winter, however, the business hours are, to a certain degree, merely formal, and the time is occupied in those petty details to be found in any occupation. True, a certain amount of trade prevails at the larger posts throughout the year, which, at the remote establishments, takes the form of outfitting traders who visit Indian camps, or small trading-stations at a distance, with dog-trains. But there is always much time, even during the hours supposed to be especially devoted to business, for which it is difficult to find full employment.

At six o'clock in the evening the labors of the day terminate, and the members of the community are at liberty to pass the remaining hours of the twenty-four as they list. And these are the monotonous hours which drag most wearily upon each individual member. In the summer season, recourse is had to athletic exercises during the long twilights—rowing

upon the rivers, pitching quoits, equestrian excursions, etc., obtaining with the younger and more hardy clerks; others the pleasures of the chase attract, and prolonged forays with dog and gun are made upon the waterfowl in the neighboring water-courses. But this vernal season is brief, and the time soon comes when the attractions of in-door life must supply the mental pabulum. For this purpose numerous modes of employment are resorted to.

With the officer in charge the long evenings are generally passed in the society of his family, and in writing up the log-book of the post. This latter work, if he be a man given to composition, soon becomes a labor of love. In it he chronicles all the petty incidents of the day: the arrivals and departures; the principal receipts and expenditures; the health of the little community under his charge, etc. To this he appends a meteorological report with all the exactness of "Old Prob." himself. There may be added, also, the general reflections of the writer on subjects pertaining to the service, and such suggestions as seem to grow out of the events noted. He may even wander to a limited extent outside the bounds of strict business matters, and indulge in little flights of composition on subjects irrelevant to the trade. It happens not infrequently that short poems of greater or less measures of excellence, and brief prose sketches of fair diction and vivid imaginings, appear scattered among the dry bones of statistics. But it must be said of the majority of log-books that they smack only of weather-reports, the deficiencies of the frozen-fish supply, or the accumulation of peltries.

With the younger portion of the community—the clerks, apprentices, and post-masters—conversation and the peaceful

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pipe occupy a prominent position in the passage of time. Games, too, are in great demand, and every apartment possesses its well-thumbed pack of cards, its rude cribbage-board, and sets of wooden dominoes. Reading men find abundant leisure to pursue their favorite occupation during the long winter evenings. Books, as the property of private individuals, from the difficulty in transporting them, are, however, more scarce than might be expected. To atone somewhat for this, the company have established extensive libraries for the use of the officers and servants in many of the larger stations in the north, from which supplies for the adjacent smaller posts may be drawn, so that the diligent reader may command new books from time to time. Then, too, there comes once or twice during the winter season a red-letter day, upon which the mail arrives, bringing a long list of letters to be answered, and periodicals from the outer world. As in the remote northern posts the mail has been a year upon the way, the file of newspapers is laid carefully away, each number being produced and read as its date, one year after publication, is reached. In the answering of letters considerable difficulty is experienced from the absence of anything new to write about. To obviate this and produce the requisite novelty, the writer generally succeeds in composing a single letter having the desired degree of spiciness. This he copies and sends to all those friends whom he is desirous of placing under the obligation of an answer. Thus, for many days after the arrival of a mail, occupation for the long evenings is easily found, until the returning dog-train bears his correspondence away, and with it that method of passing time.

Parties not studiously inclined often pass their spare hours

in exercising their skill upon one of the musical instruments. Of these the violin, on account probably of its portable nature, is most ordinarily selected, and the votary, after a series of years passed in sedulous practice, usually attains a certain ghastly facility of execution. So common an accomplishment indeed is fiddle-playing in the service, that violin-strings are annually forwarded as a part of the regular outfit for sale in the northern districts. Under the inspiration of this instrument, it is scarcely to be wondered at that the few holidays of the year, and frequently the long evenings also, should be enlivened with dances, in which all the dusky maidens within hailing-distance of the fort participate. It is in the enjoyment of this pastime that the wearied clerk finds his chief delight; and he jigs and reels the hours away to the measures of monotonous and oft-repeated tunes. On such occasions the company is cosmopolitan to a striking degree, and all grades of employés mingle on terms of the most democratic equality.

With such simple pleasures and in the discharge of such duties, the life of the isolated community glides uneventfully away. If its amusements are few, they are at least innocent and improved to the utmost. Few temptations to wrong-doing are presented to their solitary lives. Each succeeding year adds to the accumulations of the last, until, in the early afternoon of life, the company's officer finds himself possessed of abundant means to pass the remainder of his days under more genial conditions. But, strange to say, it almost invariably happens that his old life has so grown upon him, so entirely possessed him, that the charms of a higher civilization have no power to attract. We have seen many bid a final

farewell to the inhospitable regions where the best years of their lives had been spent, with the purpose of returning to their early homes to pass the decline of life; but one after another they drifted back again. The change was too abrupt. They had outlived their former friends; their ways of life were radically different; in short, the great busy world moved all too fast for their quiet and placid lives.

A NORTHERN RIVER.

CHAPTER VI.

A VOYAGE WITH THE VOYAGEURS.

INFINITELY picturesque was the starting of the boat-brigade for the Mission of the White Dog and beyond. Far down on the sandy beach, below the eyrie upon which was perched a Hudson's Bay Company's post—a veritable mediæval castle transplanted to the bluffs of the Northwest—lay the eight boats composing it. Just then they were in holiday apparel, and decorated for departure: small red flags, streaming ribbons, gaudy ensigns, and the spreading antlers of moose and elk, appeared everywhere above the square packages of freight. Congregated upon the beach, attired in their bravest apparel, and accompanied by wives and sweethearts, who had come to wish them a final "*Bon voyage*," were the seventy or more half-breed and Indian *voyageurs* who constituted their crews.

The crowd ran the gamut of color from the deep copper of the aboriginal to the pure white of the Caucasian. Many of the women were clearly of unmingled Indian blood. Tall and angular, long masses of straight black hair fell over their backs; blue-and-white cotton gowns, shapeless, stayless, uncrinolined, displayed the flatness of their unprojecting figures. Some wore a gaudy handkerchief on the head; the married also bound one across the bosom. The half castes were in better form, many of them being quite handsome. It was

not, however, their comeliness of feature which impressed the traveler: it was their grace; that supple shapeliness, that *sveltesse*, for which the English tongue has no word. Theirs was the rich dark beauty of the Creole type. Smaller in figure, they were at once better rounded, and more lithe and willowy. A comely half-breed woman's figure impresses one as a startling realization of the Greek ideal of grace—a statue by Phidias animated and garbed—a living Venus of flushed bronze. Beauty of feature with them is, perhaps, not a common gift; but when one does find it, he straightway dreams of Titian, and Veronese, and Tintoretto.

The *voyageurs* themselves, if Indian, were generally young men, heavy-set, copper-colored, and highly ornamented; their black hair greased, and plaited into small braids, from which depended bright-colored ribbons, and feathers. About their thick necks were broad bands of wampum, from which hung, suspended over the throat, huge silver medals. These medals were not the rewards of valuable service, however, but may be purchased at any company's store. Their capotes were open at the throat, and revealed broad, uncovered chests, corded with muscles. In place of the customary variegated sash, they wore broad leather belts, in which were slung their fire-bags, beaded and quilled, containing pipe and tobacco, flint and steel, and serving also, upon occasion, as pocket-books.

If the *voyageur* were half-breed, however, he was a little above the medium height, with lithe, active frame, enough of the aboriginal to give suppleness, and sufficient of the white to impart a certain solidity of frame lacking in the savage. His features, too, were regular to a fault; complexion nut-

brown; eyes black, and long black hair hanging down in a straight mass over his shoulders. He wore a tasseled cap, and was also *en capote*, but of fine blue cloth ornamented with two rows of silver-gilt buttons; variegated sash, corduroy trousers, and moccasins, of course.

As a rule, the *voyageurs* are of French origin, descendants of the traders and trappers of the old fur-companies, though by long intermarriage the blood of three or four nationalities mingles in their veins. Their grandfathers have been French-Canadian, their grandmothers Cree squaws; English, and Crow, and Ojibway, have contributed to their descent on the mother's side. This mixture has produced, in most instances, a genial, good-humored, and handsome fellow; although, as a class, with some cleverness and cheerfulness, their faces generally betray a certain moodiness of temper, and lack the frank and honest respectability stamped upon countenances more purely Anglo-Saxon. Swarthy in complexion, with dark hair and eyes, their features are generally good and aquiline in character; and, though sometimes coarse, are invariably well-proportioned. Physically they are a fine race; tall, straight, and well-proportioned, lightly formed but strong, and extremely active and enduring. Of more supple build, as a rule, than the Indian, they combine his endurance and readiness of resource with the greater muscular strength and perseverance of the white man.

In disposition they are a merry, light-hearted and obliging race, recklessly generous, hospitable and extravagant. When idle, they spend much of their time in singing, dancing, and gossiping from house to house, getting drunk upon the

slightest occasion; and when the *vogageur* drinks, he does it, as he says, *comme il faut*—that is, until he obtains the desired happiness of complete intoxication. Vanity is his besetting sin, and he will deprive himself and his family of the common necessaries of life to become the envied possessor of any gewgaw that may attract his fancy. Intensely superstitious, and a firm believer in dreams, omens and warnings, he is an apt disciple of the Romish faith. Completely under the influence of his priest, in most respects, and observing the outward forms of his religion with great regularity, he is yet grossly immoral, often dishonest, and generally untrustworthy. No sense of duty seems to actuate his daily life; for, though the word "devoir" is frequently on the lips of this semi-Frenchman, the principle of "devoir" is not so strong in his heart as are the impulses of passion and caprice. But little aptitude for continuous labor, moreover, belongs to his constitution. No man will labor more cheerfully and gallantly at the severe toil pertinent to his calling; but these efforts are of short duration, and when they are ended, his chief desire is to do nothing but eat, drink, smoke and be merry—all of them acts in which he greatly excels.

The ceremony of taking a wife, by which this mercurial race sprang into existence in the old days of the fur-trade, cannot be considered, in the light of the present day, as an elaborate performance, or one much encumbered with social and religious preliminaries. If it failed in literally fulfilling the condition of force implied in the word "taking," it usually degenerated into a mere question of barter. When

the French-Canadian wanted a wife, he took a horse, a gun, some white cloth or beads, and, repairing to the lodge of his red brother in the wilderness, purchased the heart and hand of the squaw he desired from her stern parent. If she did not love after "these presents," the lodge-poles were always handy to enforce that obedience necessary to domestic tranquillity. This custom, we may say, has by no means fallen into disuse, but is still in vogue along the border.

As a class, the *voyageurs* rank very low in the country. Their priests profess to have a certain influence over them, but admit that their flock is disreputable, and not to be relied upon in the faithful performance of a contract. As a consequence, it sometimes happens that the crews of a boat-brigade mutiny during a voyage, and return home. This evil, it is true, might be obviated were it not for the system of advancing wages for the trip, necessary in dealing with the class of which, for the most part, the crews are composed. But, unfortunately, on the *voyageurs'* return from the summer voyages they do not betake themselves to any special modes of industry, but vary seasons of hunting and fishing with longer intervals of total idleness. Toward mid-winter, a steady perseverance in this mode of life brings themselves, and their equally improvident families, to a condition closely allied to starvation. When, about the middle of December, the books are opened at the company's offices for the enrollment of men to serve in the trips of the ensuing season, a general rush of the needy crowd takes place. Upon their acceptance and enrollment, a small advance is made; and afterward, at stated

intervals before the beginning of the voyage, further sums are paid. Toward spring, however, when the difficulty of obtaining food lessens in some degree, the men assume a higher tone, and demand larger sums in advance; threatening that, if their demands are not complied with, they will not proceed upon the voyage at all. Counter threats of imprisonment are superciliously smiled away with the remark that the time will be more easily passed in durance than in labor. The result is, that when the day of embarkation arrives, some of the enrolled men do not appear, while those who do have already received half their wages. Once on the voyage, their wives and families draw as frequently as practicable upon the amount "still coming to them," so that the sum forfeited by mutiny and breach of contract is insufficient to restrain the men from a premature return.

The continuance of this system has been caused by the necessities of the men, whom it preserves from absolute starvation, and the undoubted fact that the laborious nature of the service renders it difficult, if not impossible, to secure men in the spring, when many other opportunities exist of gaining a livelihood in other and less trying channels.

It is customary to distribute a small quantity of rum among the men immediately before starting, and this, together with the probably considerable amount previously surreptitiously obtained, materially increased the hilarity and excitement of our departure. The Pierres became gratuitously profuse in their farewells, returning again and again to clasp the hands of the entire assembly, and claiming every one as a

brother; the Antóines, violently gesticulative, declaimed with cheerful irrelevance some old *chanson* about the glory of their ancestors; while the Baptistes hung, limply lachrymose, upon the necks of their best friends, murmuring maudlin sentiment into their receptive ears. Here and there, sober, and with an air of vast importance, stalked a sturdy steersman, getting his men well in hand, and having an eye to the lading of his particular boat. Busy clerks and voluble porters vied with chatting, laughing women in augmenting the Babel of sound.

All things being at last ready, the boat of the guide swung into the stream, followed closely by the others in single file. Vociferous cheers greeted us from the well-lined banks, and the wild boat-songs of the *voyageurs*, sung in full chorus, began —a weird but pleasing melody. Steadily the oars were plied, and regularly the beat and rhythm of oar-lock and song resounded, until, sweeping round a projecting headland, fort and friends were lost to view.

The lower course of the Red River of the North presents, for the last thirty miles, a picture of grand simplicity, and, it must be confessed, monotony, which, magnificent as it appears, wearies the eye and tires the mind at last. Flowing, like all other prairie-streams, deep below the surface of the plain, there is nothing to be seen but the dead calm of an unruffled, mirror-like sheet of water glaring in the sun, and, as far as the eye can reach, two walls of dark-green foliage with the deep-blue firmament above them. In the foreground, slender stems of cotton-wood and gigantic oaks, with long festoons of moss hanging from their aged limbs, dip down into

the turbid flood. No hill breaks the finely-indented line of foliage, which everywhere bounds the horizon; only here and there a half-breed's hut, or the *tepee* of some child of the prairie and stream, peeps out of the green. Happily, the novelty of a first voyage by boat-brigade was sufficient to engross the attention of the traveler, and attract his thoughts from the magnificent panorama offered by Nature, to the vignette of northern boat-life embraced within the limits occupied by the eight boats speeding their way down the centre of the broad stream.

The comparatively limited season during which water tranportation is available in the Fur Land; the nature of the cargoes to be transported, and the channels through which they must pass, render the strictly summer months a season of much bustle and activity. The loss of a few days in the departure of boats, destined for the interior, may deprive some important district of the means of traffic for the ensuing year, and necessitate the holding over of immense stocks of goods, to the serious derangement of trade, and a heavy curtailment of the annual profits. The matter of transportation, then, is one of vital importance to the fur-company, and is conducted with a care and system devoted, perhaps, to no other branch of a trade in which close attention to details and routine are distinguishing characteristics. Though the actual duties of freighting occupy but about four months in the year, yet the preparation pertinent to its perfect performance engrosses to a great extent the remaining eight. The result is a system so perfect that over the long courses traversed by

the boat-brigades their arrival may be calculated upon almost to the hour; and the anxious trader may ascend his lookout post with the certainty of seeing, sweeping round the nearest point, the well-laden boats, with swarthy crews bending low to their oars, and singing their weird *chansons* in time to the measured oar-stroke.

The freighting season begins about the first week in June, when the ice has disappeared from the rivers, and the spring supplies of merchandise, destined for the interior, have reached the depot-forts. At that period, the advance brigade of seven or eight boats leaves Fort Garry—now the principal point of forwarding in the service—followed a week later by yet another. This interval is allowed in order to prevent the meeting of the boats at any post, thereby creating undue bustle and confusion. These boats tend north and northwest, toward Methy Portage and York Factory, there to meet other brigades from the remote arctic regions, to whom they deliver their cargoes, receiving in exchange the furs brought down from the interior posts—the proceeds of the year's trade. When this exchange is effected, each brigade retraces its course. The time occupied by the longest trip—that of Methy Portage, the height of land from which the waters flow into Hudson's Bay and the Arctic Ocean—is about four months. Numerous shorter trips are also made, and the whole country is alive during this season with advancing and returning boats.

The peculiar nature of the transportation service of the company necessitates certain conditions in freight, boats and

boatmen pertaining to it, not elsewhere to be found. The entire water-carriage of the country is performed by means of what are technically called "inland boats," of three and a half tons' burden, and requiring nine men as crew. Of the shape of the ordinary whale-boat, they carry a small mast, unstepped at will, upon which in crossing lakes, should the wind prove favorable, a square sail is set. A small platform, or deck, covers the stern of the vessel, upon which is seated the steersman, using at times the ordinary rudder-lever; again, a long sweep, with one stroke of which the direction of the craft is radically changed. The steersman is captain of the vessel, the eight men under him being ranged as middle-men, or rowers. A number of these boats constitute a brigade, over which a guide, skilled in the intricacies of current and coast, is placed, and who may be regarded as the commodore of the fleet. His duty is to guide the brigade through dangerous waters, to support the authority of the steersmen, and to transact the business of the brigade at the stations touched *en route*. The position is an important one when properly filled, and is generally held by the same person until advancing years necessitate his relinquishment.

Rapidly we sped down the waters of the turbid stream, and monotonously echoed the loud "ough" of the boatmen, as they rose from their seats with each stroke of the oar, only to sink back again with a sudden jar as the broad blades left the water. Stately swans looking thoughtfully into the stream, tall cranes standing motionless on one leg, and ducks of every hue disappearing behind the foliage screening the mouth of

some creek or coolie, were the only living things to be seen. The landscape was monotonously splendid, and the hours passed in unvarying succession. Ten minutes in every hour were allowed the hardy *voyageurs* for rest; the long oars were lifted from the flood, from every fire-bag came pipes and tobacco, and the bark of the grey willow, mingled with equal proportions of the Indian weed, lent its fragrance to the morning air. After such pleasant interlude, the paddles were plied with renewed vigor, and soon the woods disappeared and the banks, which gradually sank to a lower level, became covered with the long reedy grass marking the delta of the stream. Further on, even the semblance of vegetation afforded by the reeds ceased abruptly, leaving naught but a sandy bar, submerged at high tide, and the waters of an immense lake extending northward out of sight—a lake which stretched away into unseen places, and on whose waters a fervid June sun was playing strange freaks of mirage and inverted shore-land.

Upon the sand-bar at the outlet of the main channel our boats were run along-shore, and preparations ensued for the mid-day meal. Generally speaking, while voyaging it is only allowable to put ashore for breakfast, a cold dinner being taken in the boats; but as no *voyageur* could be expected to labor in his holiday-apparel, a halt was necessary before setting out upon the lake.

The low beach yielded ample store of driftwood, the relics of many a northern gale, and of this a fire was lighted, and the dinner apparatus arranged in the stern-sheets of the boat.

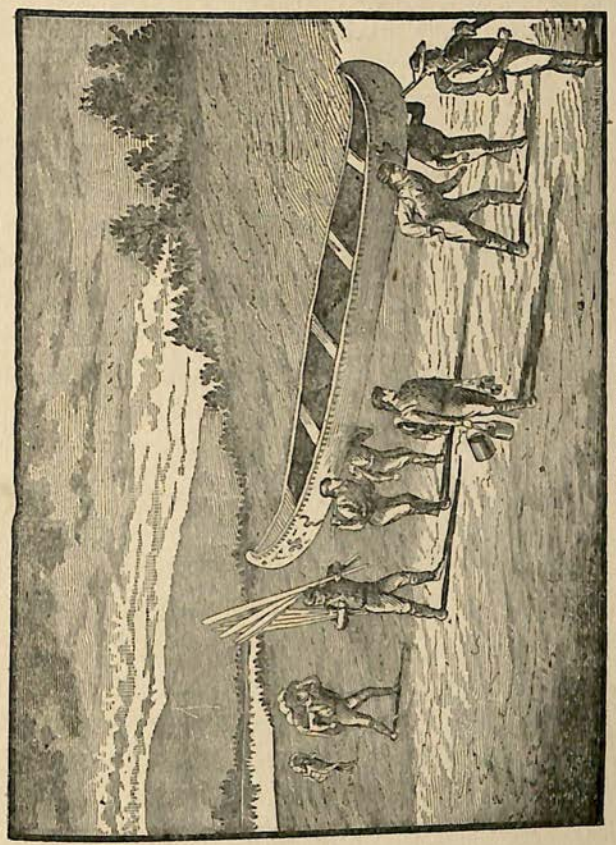
The functions of the *chef*, limited to the preparation of pemmican in some palatable form, and the invariable dish of black tea, were simple enough. For boatmen pemmican is the unalterable bill-of-fare, and is the favorite food of the half-breed and Indian *voyageur*. The best form of pemmican, made for table use, generally has added to it ten pounds of sugar per bag, and saskootoom or service berries—the latter acting much as currant jelly does with venison, correcting the greasiness of the fat by a slightly acid sweetness. Sometimes wild cherries are used instead of the saskootoom. This berry-pemmican is considered the best of its kind, and is very palatable.

As to the appearance of the commoner form of pemmican, take the scrapings from the driest outside corner of a very stale piece of cold roast-beef, add to it lumps of tallowy, rancid fat, then garnish all with long human hairs, on which string pieces, like beads upon a necklace, and short hairs of dogs or oxen, or both, and you have a fair imitation of common pemmican. Indeed, the presence of hairs in the food has suggested the inquiry whether the hair on the buffaloes from which the pemmican is made does not grow on the inside of the skin. The abundance of small stones or pebbles in pemmican also indicates the discovery of a new buffalo diet heretofore unknown to naturalists.

Carefully made pemmican, flavored with berries and sugar, is nearly good; but of most persons new to the diet it may be said that, in two senses, a little of it goes a long way. Nothing can exceed its sufficing quality; it is equal or superior to the famous Prussian sausage, judging of it as we must.

Two pounds' weight, with bread and tea, is enough for the dinner of eight hungry men. A bag weighing one hundred pounds, then, would supply three good meals for one hundred and thirty men. A sledge-dog that will eat from four to six pounds of fish per day, when at work, will only consume two pounds of pemmican, if fed upon that food alone. Hungry men are often seen to laugh incredulously at a small handful of pemmican placed before them as sufficient for a meal; yet they go away satisfied, leaving half of it. On the other hand, half-breeds and Indians will eat four pounds of it in a single day; appetites like that, however, do not count in ordinary food estimates.

The flavor of pemmican depends much on the fancy of the person eating it. There is no other article of food that bears the slightest resemblance to it, and as a consequence it is difficult to define its peculiar flavor by comparison. It may be prepared for the table in many different ways, the consumer being at full liberty to decide which is the least objectionable. The method largely in vogue among the *voyageurs* is that known as "pemmican straight," that is, uncooked. But there are several ways of cooking which improve its flavor to the civilized palate. There is *rubeiboo*, which is a composition of potatoes, onions, or other esculents, and pemmican, boiled up together, and, when properly seasoned, very palatable. In the form of *richot*, however, pemmican is best liked by persons who use it, and by the *voyageurs*. Mixed with a little flour and fried in a pan, pemmican in this form can be eaten, provided the appetite be sharp, and there is



MAKING A PORTAGE.

nothing else to be had. This last consideration is, however, of importance.

As to the consumption of tea by the *voyageurs*, it is simply enormous. The delay which would be occasioned were the demands of the men with reference to tea-drinking to be indulged, renders guides and steersmen peremptory in opposing the ever-renewed proposition that the boat should be hauled-to, and the kettle put on the fire, wherever an inviting promontory presents itself along the route.

After dinner the *voyageurs* doffed the holiday-apparel in which the start had been made, appearing thereafter in traveling costume. These changes made, the *ensemble* of the crews became rougher, but more picturesque. Corduroy trousers, tied at the knee with beadwork garters, encased their limbs; capotes were discarded, and striped shirts open in front, with cotton handkerchiefs tied sailor-fashion round their swarthy necks, took their place; a scarlet sash encircled the waist of each, while moose-skin moccasins defended their feet. Their head-dresses were as various as fanciful—some trusted to their thickly-matted hair to guard them from the sun and rain; some wore caps of coarse cloth, others twisted colored kerchiefs turban-fashion round their heads; while one or two sported tall black hats covered so plenteously with tassels and feathers as to be scarcely recognizable. They were a wild yet handsome set of men, as they lay or stood in careless attitudes round the fires, puffing clouds of smoke from their ever-burning pipes.

At the command of the guide, however, they fell to re-

adjusting the cargoes of the boats for the passage of the lake, and the portages immediately beyond. For on the waters traversed by these brigades navigation is seriously interrupted by rapids, waterfalls and cataracts, to surmount which the boats with their cargoes have to be landed and carried round the obstruction, to be relaunched at the nearest practicable point. Again it occurs that a height of land is reached, across which the boats and merchandise must be dragged in order to descend the opposite stream. In either event the process is technically known as "making a portage," and constitutes the hardest feature of the *voyageur's* labor.

It is owing to the vast amount of handling, necessitated by the numerous portages intervening between the depot-forts and even the nearest inland districts, that the packing of merchandise becomes a matter of so great importance. The standard weight of each package used in the fur-trade is one hundred pounds, and each boat is supposed capable of containing seventy-five "inland pieces," as such packages are called. It is the method of reckoning tonnage in the country. The facility with which such pieces are handled by the muscular tripmen is very remarkable—a boat being loaded by its crew of nine men in five minutes, and presenting a neat, orderly appearance upon completion of the operation.

In crossing a portage, each boatman is supposed to be equal to the task of carrying two inland pieces upon his back. These loads are carried in such a manner as to allow the whole strength of the body to be put into the work. A broad leather band, called a "portage strap," is placed round the

forehead, the ends of which strap, passing back over the shoulders, support the pieces which, thus carried, lie along the spine from the small of the back to the crown of the head. When fully loaded, the *voyageur* stands with his body bent forward, and with one hand steadying the pieces, he trots nimbly away over the steep and rock-strewn portage, his bare or moccasined feet enabling him to pass briskly over the slippery rocks in places where boots would inevitably send both tripman and load feet-foremost to the bottom. In the frequent unloading of the vessel, the task of raising the pieces and placing them upon the backs of the muscular *voyageurs* devolves upon the steersman ; and the task of raising seventy-five packages of one hundred pounds' weight from a position below the feet to a level with the shoulders, demands a greater amount of muscle than is possessed by the average man.

Winnipeg, like all other great lakes, is liable to be visited with sudden storms, which, taking a boat by surprise while in the process of making a long traverse, might be attended with fatal consequences. The coasts, generally speaking, offer only a limited number of harbors for small boats, but these fortunately within a few hours' sail of each other. In the event of a boat being overtaken by a sudden tempest, it is sometimes necessary to make for the nearest land and "beach" her, carrying herself and cargo ashore by main force, over a considerable length of breaker-washed shore.

It was for this reason, perhaps, that our guide marched solemnly to and fro upon the shingle, curiously examining, with twisted neck and upturned eyes, the signs of the

weather; and presenting, with his long blue great-coat and cautious gait, a somewhat quaint and antiquated spectacle. Having with some difficulty satisfied himself that the weather would hold good until we could reach the nearest harbor, he recalled the crews—who had scattered along-shore, smoking their pipes—and loosed from land. The lake, changeful as the ocean, was in its very calmest mood; not a wave, not a ripple on its surface; not a breath of air to aid the untiring paddles. The guide held his course far out into the glassy waste, leaving behind the marshy headlands which marked the river's delta. The point at which we had dined became speedily undistinguishable among the long line of apparently exactly similar localities ranging along the low shore.

A long, low point reaching out from the south shore of the lake, was faintly visible on the horizon, and toward it our guide steered. The traveler, seated comfortably on the deck of the boat, indulged alternately in reading and smoking; the whole style of progress being more like the realization of a scene from Telemaque or the Æneid, than a sober business voyage undertaken in the interests of a trading company of the present day.

The red sun sank into the lake, warning us to seek the shore and camp for the night, as we reached the point toward which we steered. A deep, sandy bay, with a high background of woods and rocks, seemed to invite us to its solitude. The boats were moored in a recess of the bank, or drawn bodily upon the beach; sails brought ashore, and roofs extemporized as protection against possible storms. Drift-wood was again

collected, and active preparations for the evening meal ensued. Each boat's crew had a fire to itself, over which were placed gypsy-like tripods, from which huge tin kettles depended; while above them hovered numerous volunteer cooks, who were employed in stirring their contents with persevering industry. The curling wreaths of smoke formed a black cloud among the numerous fleecy ones arising from the steaming kettles, while all around, in every imaginable attitude, sat, stood, and reclined the sunburned savage-looking *voyageurs*, laughing, chatting, and smoking, in perfect happiness.

Meanwhile, the bedding of the traveler, after being unwrapped from its protecting oil-cloths, was spread upon the ground. Bedding consists of, say, three blankets and a pillow. The former are folded lengthways, and arranged on the oil-cloth, which, when camp is struck in the morning, is so rolled about them as to form a compact, portable bundle, when properly corded, practically impervious to weather.

All occupations ceased at the call of the cooks, and the crews gathered round the camp-fire with their scant supply of tinware. The bill-of-fare was limited, as before, to pemmican and tea. As the brigade penetrates the interior, however, wild-fowl become abundant, and the stews more fragrant and savory. Supper over, half a dozen huge log-fires are lighted round about, casting a ruddy glow upon the surrounding foliage, and the wild, uncouth figures of the *voyageurs*, with their long, dark hair hanging in luxuriant masses over their bronzed faces. They warm themselves in the cheerful glow, smoking

and chatting with much good-humor and carelessness of the day's adventures, or rather of what are regarded as such—unusual good or ill-luck at fishing or hunting, the casual meeting of some aboriginal canoe, or the sight of some lone Indian's leather lodge. Only the dense swarms of mosquitoes, which set in immediately after sunset, remind the traveler that he is not realizing a scene from tropical life.

To be appreciated, the pain and inconvenience caused by the attacks of these little insects must be felt. They swarm in the woods and marshes, and, lying amid the shade of the bushes during the heat of the day, come abroad in the cool of the evening and make night hideous where no grateful breeze blows for the protection of the traveler. They form, in fact, the principal drawback to the pleasure of summer travel in the Fur Land. The *voyageur*, after working hard through the long, hot day, simply spreads the single blanket he is allowed to carry on the ground, and with no other covering than the starry firmament above him, sleeps undisturbed till dawn; only occasionally brushing away, as if by way of diversion, the most obtrusive of the little fiends. But the more refined and less case-hardened traveler suffers severely. In vain are trousers tied tightly about the ankles, and coat sleeves at the wrist, while mosquito veils surround the head. The enemy finds his way in single file through apertures unseen by human eyes, and bites without mercy; while his personal escape is secured by the impossibility of hunting him up without making way for the surrounding hosts of his *confreres*. For the victim, feeding under such circumstances

is no easy matter. Independent of the loss of appetite occasioned by the nature of the situation, the veil must be removed to obtain access to the mouth, and the hands must be uncovered to work knife, fork, and spoon. Sleep is also to be obtained only for a few short, feverish moments at long intervals. Any attempt to gain repose by concealing one's self beneath the blankets is in vain ; and long before sleep can come, the baffled experimenter is compelled to emerge, half smothered, to breathe the sultry air.

The traveler can, however, often have an awning fitted up over the stern-sheets of the boat, and sleep on board. By this arrangement, in the event of a favorable breeze blowing at daybreak, the crews can pursue their journey without disturbing him. On the other hand, the traveler is often called upon to give up the boat to the men during the night, so that they may be further removed from the mosquitoes, and better prepared for work on the ensuing day, when the passenger can make up for the night's sleeplessness. Under this system, then, the steersman occupies the stern-sheets, while the crew, by arranging the mast and oars lengthways over the boat, and stretching oil-cloths over the framework so formed, turn the vessel into one long, snug tent, in which they can rest in comfort. This device is called a "tanley," the word being corrupted from the French "*tendre-le.*"

In the early morning, before the mists had risen from the waters, the loud "Leve ! leve ! leve ! " of the guide roused the camp. Five minutes were sufficient to complete the traveler's toilet, tie up his blankets, and embark. The prows of

the boat-brigade swung into the lake, and the day's voyage began. Usually a short sail is made until a favorable camping-spot is reached, when the boats are again beached, and the breakfast prepared. Then succeeds a renewed plying of the oars, or, if the wind prove favorable, the sails are set, and the little fleet glides smoothly upon its way. When the wind is fair and the weather fine, boats make very long traverses, keeping so far out that, about the middle of the run, neither the point from which they started nor the one toward which they are steering is visible. In calm weather, however, when the oars are used, it is usual to keep closer in-shore, and make shorter traverses. The pursuit of game and wild-fowl, daily indulged in, tends to vary the monotony of the voyage. Occasionally the breeding-places of the latter are found, in which event the crews lay in a stock of eggs and young birds sufficient for the voyage. Again, returning boats are encountered, and a short season devoted to the exchange of news and compliments.

The wind springing up, the guide ordered all sail set, and stood far out into the lake. The boats of the brigade proving very unequal sailors, from difference of build and diverse lading, the white sails soon lost all semblance of line, and straggled over the placid waters of the lake, each upon its own tack. Nor did they meet again until we entered the mouth of Winnipeg River, shortly after mid-day, and prepared to encounter its twenty-seven portages, the first of which began but eight miles above the company's fort, at its delta.

The Winnipeg River, with twice the volume of water the

Rhine pours forth, descends three hundred and sixty feet in a distance of one hundred and sixty miles. This descent is not effected by a continuous decline, but by a series of terraces at irregular distances from each other, thus forming innumerable lakes and wide-spreading reaches, bound together by rapids and perpendicular falls of varying altitudes. It was over this pathway of rock and stream, of terrace and lagoon, that the course of the boat-brigade now lay. To describe the forcing of one barrier is only to iterate that of the one preceding or following it.

Passing through lonely lakes and island-studded bays, there sounds ahead the rush and roar of falling water; and, rounding some pine-clad island, or projecting point, a tumbling mass of foam and spray, studded with rocks and bordered with dark-wooded shores, bars the way. Above the falls nothing can be seen; below, the waters boil in angry surge for a moment, then leap away in maddened flight, threatening to toss the well-laden boats like corks upon their sweeping surface. But against this boiling, rushing flood comes the craft and skill of the intrepid *voyageurs*. They advance upon the fall as if it were an equally subtile enemy with themselves; they steal upon it before it is aware. The immense volume of water, after its wild leap, lingers a moment in the huge cauldron at the foot of the fall; then, escaping from the circling eddies and whirlpools, sweeps away in rushing flood into the calmer waters below.

But this mighty rush in mid-stream produces a counter-current along-shore, which, taking an opposite turn, sweeps

back nearly, if not quite, to the foot of the fall. Into this back-current the stealthy *voyageurs* steer their well-laden boat. On one side the rocky bank towers overhead, slender pine and fir-trees finding precarious foothold in its crevices; on the other, ofttimes but a yard from the advancing boat, sweeps the mad rush of the central current. Up the back-current goes the boat, driven cautiously by its oarsmen, until, just in advance of its bow, appears the whirlpool in which it ends, at the foot of the fall. To enter that revolving mass of water is to be wrecked in a twinkling; to turn into the broad current of the mid-stream is, apparently, to be swept away in a moment of time. What next?

For a moment there is no paddling, the bowsman and steersman alone keeping the boat in position, as she rapidly drifts into the whirlpool. Among the crew not a word is spoken, but every man is at his utmost tension, and awaiting the instant which shall call every muscle, nerve, and intelligence into play. Now the supreme moment has come; for on one side begins the mighty rush of the mid-current, and on the other circle and twist the smooth, green, hollowing curves of the angry whirlpool, revolving round its axis of air with a giant strength that would overturn and suck down the stanch whale-boat in the twinkling of an eye. Just as the prow touches the angry curves, a quick shout is given by the bowsman, and the boat shoots full into the centre of the rushing stream, driven by the united efforts of the entire crew, supplemented by extra oarsmen from the other boats. The men work for their very lives, and the boat breasts across the

stream full in the face of the fall. The waters foam and dash around her; the mad waves leap over the gunwale; the *voyageurs* shout as they dash their oars like lightning into the flood; and the traveler holds his breath amidst this war of man against Nature. But the struggle seems useless. Man can effect naught against such a torrent; the boat is close against the rocks, and is driven down despite the rapid strokes of the oarsmen. For an instant she pauses, as if gathering strength for her mad flight down the mid-channel. The dead strength of the rushing flood seems to have prevailed, when, lo! the whole thing is done. A dexterous twist of the oars, and the boat floats suddenly beneath a little rocky isle in mid-stream, at the foot of the falls. The portage-landing is over this rock, while a few yards out on either side the mighty flood sweeps on its headlong course. A *voyageur* leaps out on the wet, slippery rock, and holds the boat in place while the others get out. The cool fellows laugh as they survey the torrent they have just defeated, then turn to carry the freight piece by piece up the rocky stairway, and deposit it upon the flat landing ten feet above. That accomplished, the boat is dragged over, and relaunched upon the very lip of the fall.

But slightly different was the ascent of many of the rapids encountered from time to time. Upon arriving at one, advantage was taken of the back-current near the banks to run up as far as the eddy would permit; then the bowsman rose from his seat, and craned his neck forward to take a look before attempting the passage. Signaling the route he intended

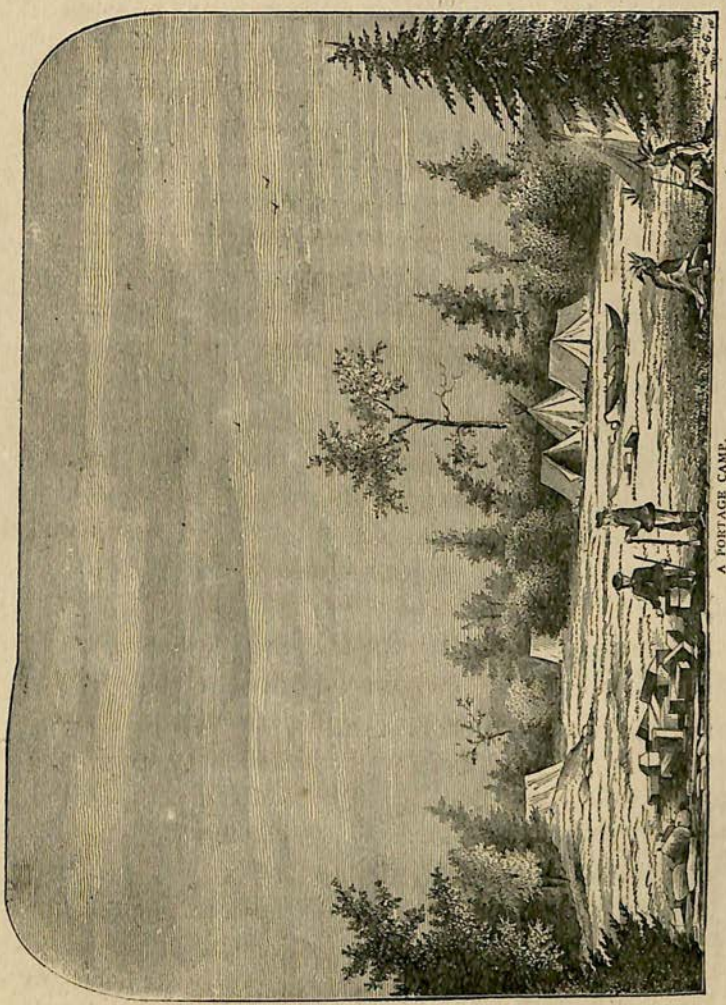
to pursue to the steersman, the boat at once shot into the chaos of boiling waters that rushed swiftly by. At first it was swept downward with the speed of an arrow, while the mad flood threatened to swamp it in a moment. To the traveler, unaccustomed to such perilous navigation, it seemed utter folly to attempt the ascent; but a moment more revealed the plan, and brought the stanch craft into a temporary harbor. Right in the middle of the central current a huge rock rose above the surface, while from its base a long eddy ran, like the gradually-lessening tail of a comet, nearly a score of yards down the stream. It was just opposite this rock that the *voyageurs* had entered the rapid, and for which they paddled with all their might. The current, sweeping them down, brought the boat just to the extreme point of the eddy by the time mid-stream was reached, and a few vigorous strokes of the oars floated it quietly in the lee of the rock. A minute's rest, and the bowsman selected another rock a few yards higher up, but a good deal to one side. Another rush was made, and the second haven reached. In this way, yard by yard, the boat-brigade ascended for miles, sometimes scarcely gaining a foot; again, as a favoring bay or curve presented a long stretch of smooth water, advancing more rapidly.

In rapids where the strength of the current forbade the use of oars, progress was made by means of the tracking-line. Tracking, as it is called, is dreadfully harassing work. Half the crew go ashore, and drag the boat slowly along, while the other half go asleep. After an hour's walk, the others take

their turn, and so on, alternately, during the entire day. As the banks about the rapids were generally high and very precipitous, the *voyageurs* had to scramble along, now close to the water's edge, again high up on the bank, on ledges where they could hardly find a footing, and where they resembled flies on a wall. The banks, too, composed of soft clay and mud, increased the labor of hauling; but the light-hearted *voyageurs* seemed to think nothing of it, and laughed and joked as they toiled along, playing tricks upon each other, and plunging occasionally up to the waist in mud and water, with a reckless carelessness all their own.

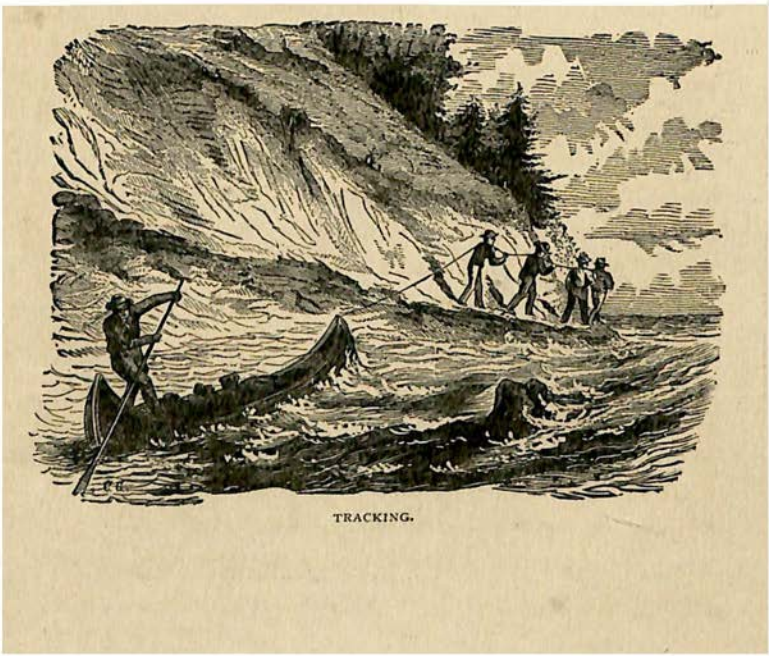
So, day after day, the boat-brigade journeyed on; through island-studded bays, over long reaches of limpid water whose placid surface not a ripple stirred, over turbid floods thick with the ooze of muddy banks, breasting fierce rapids, climbing thundering waterfalls; sometimes making a fair day's travel, again, after a day of weary toil, bivouacking almost within sight of last night's camp-fire.

One day the traveler became aware of an undue bustle and excitement among the swarthy crews of the brigade. The pointed prows were turned shoreward and run upon a pebbly beach, affording easy access to the limpid water, and facing the warm rays of the sun. The *voyageurs* brought forth all the soiled clothing worn upon the journey, and a general scrubbing took place. Soon the bushes in the vicinity, the branches of the trees, and the flat rocks, bore plentiful burdens of gaudy-colored apparel, waving in the breeze to dry. Copious baths were next administered to their persons,



A PORTAGE CAMP.

capped by each man donning the bravest garments of his outfit. Ribbons were braided in the hair, flashy sashes encircled their waists, and moccasins of bewildering beadwork encased their feet. Then, with a dash and wild chorus of boat-song, the oars were plied with quickly-measured stroke. Soon the sharp point of a headland was turned, and the Mission of the White Dog appeared, perched upon the precipitous banks of the stream. It was the end of the traveler's journey. A few huts, a few Indians, a company's trading-store, and an aroma of decaying fish which, amalgamating with the slight mist from the river, surrounded the traveler's head like an aureole.



TRACKING.

CHAPTER VII.

THE GREAT FALL HUNT.

THERE have now almost disappeared from the vast buffalo-ranges extending between the Missouri and Saskatchewan Rivers the last vestiges of what were once the most perfectly-organized, effective, and picturesque periodically-recurring hunting-excursions known to any nomadic peoples. They came within the lists, too, of what are technically known to sportsmen as "pot-hunts"—forming the almost entire support of certain well-defined border communities.

For over half a century regiments of men—with a vast following of retainers and *impedimenta*—have swept over the plains twice annually, bearing slaughter and destruction to its shaggy denizens; the product being sufficient to maintain a large colony with its various dependencies in plenty, and even in comparative luxury, for the remainder of the year. These hunts formed an almost certain means of livelihood, and, for the amount of labor required, offered inducements far superior to those of agriculture, or, indeed, any other pursuit which the scope of country presented. Moreover, they were especially adapted to the class with which they obtained—a class which, by reason of eminent fitness and efficiency, seemed particularly designed by Nature for the congenial calling.

Suggested first by the necessities of a meagre handful of half-starved immigrants, they became at length the mainstay of a considerable population, and an important factor in the commerce of the world. Wherever a buffalo-robe is found, particularly in European markets, there may be seen the business-card of this vast pot-hunt; sometimes represented by the robe itself, again by certain hieroglyphics decorating its tanned side. And this (to many) cabalistic advertisement suggests the matter of the present chapter.

In the year 1811 the Earl of Selkirk purchased of the Hudson's Bay Company the ownership of a vast tract of land, including, as a small part of the whole, the ground occupied by a colony known, until its recent purchase by the Dominion Government, as Red River Settlement, near the foot of Lake Winnipeg, in British North America. On this territory Earl Selkirk had formed the Utopian idea of settling a populous colony, of which he should be the feudal lord. A compulsory exodus of the inhabitants of the mountainous regions of the county of Sutherland, Scotland, taking place about that time, to make way for the working of the sterner realities of the system of land management which prevails on great estates in this prosaic nineteenth century, an opportunity of easily obtaining the desired colonists for the occupation of his new purchase was thus presented. The first instalment of colonists reached the bay coast in the autumn of 1811, advanced inland in the following spring, and, at the confluence of the Assiniboine and Red Rivers, about forty miles from the foot of Lake Winnipeg, found themselves—

metaphorically speaking—at home. They were in the centre of the American Continent, fifteen or sixteen hundred miles in direct distance from the nearest city residence of civilized man in America, and separated from the country whence they came by an almost impassable barrier.

Unfortunately for the successful founding of an agricultural colony, such as Lord Selkirk had planned, the rival French Canadian fur-companies, contending for the possession of the territory with the Hudson's Bay Company, chose to regard the new-comers as invaders, whose presence was detrimental to their interests; and the Indians also objected to the cultivation of their hunting-grounds. Between the persecutions of two such powerful enemies, the colonists made, after the destruction of their crops and dwellings the first year, but little attempt at agriculture, and adopted, perforce, the nomadic life of the country, visiting the plains twice annually in pursuit of buffalo. This mode of life obtained until the coalition of all the fur-companies, in the year 1821, increased the size of the colony by the acquisition of all the French hunters and traders—who selected rather to remain there than to return to Canada—and rendered the peaceful pursuit of agriculture possible.

But it occurred that, by intermarriage with the aborigines, and ten years of the free, roving life of the plain-hunter, agriculture had become distasteful to the younger portion of the sturdy Scots, while the French, of course, still clung to old habits, relying entirely upon the chase for a livelihood. So it happened that, while a small minority of the first colonists

—those of advanced age—adopted the cultivation of the soil, the large majority of the eight or ten thousand people forming the settlement followed the chase; thus presenting the anomaly of a settled, civilized community subsisting by the pursuits common to nomadic life; in reality, civilized nomads. From those early days up to the present, when civilization by rapid strides has encroached upon and overrun that isolated locality, the same mode of life has obtained, with, until within the past ten years, no very perceptible change. The French portion of the colony rely entirely upon the chase, if we may except certain miniature attempts at farming; the Scotch alternating between seasons of labor with plow and hoe and the semi-annual hunts; the half-breed offspring of the latter instinctively adopting the chase. The world presents no other such incongruous picture.

It is not within our province to enter upon the details of buffalo-hunting as practiced upon the plains, and with which, doubtless, all are familiar; but it may not be devoid of interest to follow this particular hunt to its termination, as presenting certain peculiarities not found elsewhere.

The parties belonging to the summer hunt start about the beginning of June, and remain on the plains until the beginning of August. They then return to the settlements for a short time, for the purpose of trading the pemmican or dried meat, which forms the staple article of produce from the hunt. The autumn hunters start during the month of August, and remain on the prairie until the end of October, or early in November, when they usually return, bringing the fresh or

"green meat," preserved at this late season by the extreme cold, and fall buffalo-robes. This latter hunt, including all the features of the former, we select as the subject of description.

After the return of the people from the summer hunt, and a short time allowed for the sale of their produce, a few of the recognized leaders of the chase assemble to arrange the time and place of a general rendezvous for the fall hunt. The time is always set for the first days of September, but the place of rendezvous changes from year to year, as the herds of buffalo are reported by the summer hunters as being close at hand or afar off. Of late years the rendezvous has been made at Pembina Mountain, a locality on the United States boundary-line in the northeast corner of Dakota Territory, comparatively close at hand. From this point the hunt frequently divides into two sections, one proceeding in a southerly, the other in a southwesterly direction. Both time and place having been designated by the (for the time) self-constituted leaders of the hunt, the word at once passes through the colony by that subtile electricity of gossip common to the frontier as elsewhere, but generally dignified by the name of news. The rapidity with which it travels, too, suggests the entire needlessness of telegraphy.

A particular date is determined upon for departure from the rendezvous, but it is customary to meet, if possible, some days previous to that time, in order that everything may be in perfect readiness. From the day of notification to that of departure for the rendezvous, the colony is in a constant state

of preparation. In every door-yard may be seen the canvas tents and leather *tepees* of prospective hunters, stretched for repairs; carts undergoing a like renovating process, and fences decorated with dislocated sets of harness; guns and accoutrements burnished to an unwonted degree of effulgence; kettles strewed about the yard, together with wooden trunks and other paraphernalia of the camp. As the time approaches for the meet, the well-worn trails leading toward the rendezvous become vividly alive with long trains of carts, oxen, ponies, and well-groomed runners used in the final chase. Each hunter takes, in addition to the carts necessary for the conveyance of his family—for the women and children have their share in the labor equally with the men—a supply of extra vehicles in which to load the meat and robes falling to his share. And this train of carts, constantly augmented by new additions, marching in single file, for days seems interminable, sending up a refrain from ungreased axles that may be heard miles away on the prairie.

While some of the carts are devoted to the conveyance of madame, the hunter's wife, and possibly the younger children, the remainder are filled at the start with tents, bedding, camp-equipage, and provisions sufficient to last until the buffalo are reached. The ponies and oxen drawing them march in single file, and each one being tied to the tail of the vehicle before it, they become jammed together in a telescopic fashion when a sudden halt occurs in the line, and elongated on starting again in a way that is affecting to behold. About the train, as it creaks monotonously along, the loose animals are

driven, and what with their tramping feet and the dragging gait of the cart-animals the little caravan is likely to be hidden from view in the dark clouds of dust arising from the well-worn trails. The rate of travel, estimated entirely by time, is about twenty miles per day, and at this pace nearly four days are required to reach the rendezvous.

Pembina Mountain rises on the north and east in a series of table-lands, each table about half a mile in width, sparsely timbered, and bountifully supplied with springs. On its western slope, at the base of which runs the Pembina River, the mountain terminates abruptly. Across the stream, flowing deep below the surface in a narrow valley, the banks remain of about an equal height with the mountain, stretching away toward the Missouri in a bare, treeless plain, broken only by the solitary elevation in the dim distance of Ne-pauk-wa-win (Dry Dance Hill). On this bank of the river is the rendezvous, selected in accordance with an invariable rule of prairie-travel—to always cross a stream on the route before camping. As wood is not to be had on the western bank, each hunter cuts a supply for his camp-fires as he passes over the mountain; and, as no more timber will be encountered during the hunt, he also carefully selects an abundant supply of poplar-poles upon which to hang the meat to dry after the chase, and for use as frames in stretching robes to be tanned.

As hour after hour and day after day the carts come straggling in, sometimes a single hunter with his outfit of from three to ten carts, again a train so swollen by contributions along the road as to number hundreds, the camp of ren-

dezvous enlarges its borders, and presents a scene both novel and picturesque. The elevated plain on the immediate banks of the stream is covered with a motley grouping of carts, canvas tents, smoke-brown leather *tepees*, and, in lieu of other shelter, small squares of cotton or raw-hide stretched from cart to cart, or over a rough framework of poles. For miles around the prairie is alive with ponies, hoppled, tied to lariat-pins, or dragging about poles as a preventive against straying. Mingled with this kicking, neighing herd wander hundreds of oxen—patient, lowing kine, the youthful vivacity of which has given place to middle-aged steadiness. Through this compact mass of animal life gallop with a wild scurry, from time to time, half-nude boys, breaking a narrow pathway in search of some needed ox or pony, or hurrying the whole struggling mass riverward.

In the camp the sole occupation of the day is the pursuit of pleasure. From every tent and shelter comes the sound of laughter; every camp-fire furnishes its quota of jest and song. Here a small but excited circle, gathered under the shade of a cart, are deeply engaged in gambling by what is known as the "moccasin-game." In an empty moccasin are placed sundry buttons and bullets, which, being shaken up, involve the guessing of the number in the shoe. The ground is covered with guns, capotes, and shirts, the volatile half-breed often stripping the clothing from his back to satisfy his passion for play, or staking his last horse and cart. There another like-minded party are gambling with cards, the stakes being a medley of everything portable owned by the players.

In many tents rum is holding an orgy, and the clinking of cups, boisterous laughter and song, tell of the presence of the direst enemy of the hunter. In another quarter feasting is the order of the day, and the small stock of provisions, designed to supply the family until the buffalo were reached, is being devoured at a sitting. The host knows this; but, then, he selects a feast and its consequent famine. Yonder tawny Pyramus is making love to dusky Thisbe after the most approved fashion. They seem indifferent to the exposure of the camp, and conduct their wooing as if no curious eyes were upon them. About the many camp-fires stand, or crouch, the wives of the hunters, busily engaged in culinary operations, or gossiping with neighbors, while their numerous scantily-attired offspring play about in the dust and dirt with wolfish-looking dogs. The baby of the family, fastened to a board, leans against a cart-wheel, doubtless revolving in its infantile mind those subtile questions pertinent to babyhood.

Gathered in a circle apart are likely to be found the aged leaders of the hunt, engaged in discussion of the weightier matters of the time; but, from the broad smiles lighting up their bronzed features at times, it is doubtful whether many of the subjects are relevant. Perched high on a cart-wheel, farther on, sits a long-haired Paganini, drawing rude melodies from an antiquated and fractured violin. About him are congregated a crowd of delighted hearers, suggesting new tunes, requesting the loan of the instrument long enough to exhibit their own skill, or, seized with the infection, suddenly

breaking into an improvised break-down, or executing a *pas seul* the very embodiment of caricature. Reclining under the shade of carts, in every possible attitude, lie weary hunters indulging in a *siesta*, from which to be rudely awakened by some practical joke of their fellows, only to find themselves bound hand and foot. Again, the awaking is made in a manner more congenial by the mellow gurgling of proffered liquor held to the lips. About the outskirts of the camp the veteran horse-trader plies his calling, painting the merits of the animal in hand in vivid *coleur de rose*. Above all rises the clamor of many tongues, speaking many languages, the neighing of horses, the lowing of kine, the barking of hundreds of dogs, and the shouts and yells of fresh arrivals, as they pour hourly in to swell the numbers of the already vast encampment.

In the afternoon, if the day be propitious, the camp becomes for a time comparatively deserted, the noise and excitement being temporarily transferred to the distance of a mile or more upon the prairie. Here the hunter presents a totally different appearance from the lounging, tattered, unkempt personage of the morning. He has donned his holiday apparel, appearing in all the bravery of new moccasins, tasseled cap, gaudy shirt, fine blue capote, and corduroy trousers. His sash is of the most brilliant pattern, and wound about his waist to make its broadest display. He is mounted upon his best horse, with bridle and saddle decked with ribbons and bravery, and has suddenly become an alert, active, volatile, and excitable being, constantly gesticulating, shouting, and full of life. A straight course is marked off

upon the prairie of, say, half a mile in length. After well-known leaders of the hunt have been stationed at either end, the racing begins. Betting runs high, the wagers of the principals being generally horse against horse, those of outsiders ranging from valuable horses down through carts and oxen to the clothing worn at the moment. All is excitement, and as the contestants dash forward, with that peculiar plunging of the heels into the flanks of the horses at every jump, affected by the plain-hunter, it breaks forth in cheers and gesticulations of encouragement to the favorite. All points of disagreement are quickly settled by the *dictum* of the umpires, and the loser quietly strips saddle and bridle from his much-prized animal, and consoles himself for the loss in copious draughts of rum.

To the regular courses of the day succeed a multitude of scrub-races, gotten up on the spur of the moment, and involving almost every article of property as the wagers. Horses, oxen, tents, guns, clothing, provisions, and spirits, change hands with wonderful celerity, and to an accompaniment of shouts and gesticulations that would do no discredit to Bedlam. The sport continues with but little abatement throughout the afternoon, the races gradually growing shorter, however, and the wagers of more trifling value.

Toward night the huge camp becomes again resonant with a more intense Babel of sounds. The lucky winner on the race-course parades his gains, and depicts in graphic pantomime his share in the sports; while the loser bewails his losses in maudlin tones, or arranges the terms of a new race for the

morrow. The betting of the afternoon is succeeded by the deeper gambling of the evening; and the sounds of shuffling cards, the clinking of the buttons and bullets of the moccasin-game, and the exclamations of triumph and despair of winner and loser, are everywhere heard. Rum flows freely; for each hunter brings a supply to tide him over the grand encampment, and start him fairly on his journey. As the night advances, the camp grows more and more boisterous, the confusion worse confounded. The women disappear from the camp-fires, and betake themselves to tents out of harm's way. Drunken men reel about the flaming fires; wild yells fill the still air; quarrels are engendered; fierce invectives in many tongues roll from angry lips, and the saturnalia becomes general. The camp-fires light up the strange scene with a lurid glare, and tent, cart, and awning, cast fantastic shadows over all. The orgy continues late in the night, and, when the fires flicker and die out, their last feeble glow reveals shadowy forms stretched promiscuously about, sleeping the sleep of drunkenness.

With the first glow of coming dawn, the camp rouses into life and vigor again. The headaches and fevers engendered by the debauch of the previous night are carried patiently by their owners to the river's brink, and bathed in its cooling waters. The women once more appear about the camp-fires, clad in dark-blue calico—which so effectually conceals succeeding accumulations of dirt—busied in preparations for the morning meal. Their lords stand moodily near to obtain a share of the heat; for the mornings are chilly and raw. And,

as the excitement of the previous day has been dissipated by sleep, and that of the opening day is still to come, the features of the plain-hunter are in repose, betraying at a glance the nature of his employment. The theory that one's daily life leaves its impress upon the face meets with no more ample corroboration than here. The countenance at first sight would be taken for that of a resolute, reckless, and determined man. It is deeply bronzed by exposure, and is marked by numerous hard lines sharply defined about the mouth and eyes. Somewhat Assyrian in type, yet it expresses a certain cunning combined with its resolution; the eyes are watchfully vigilant; the square lower jaw prominent and firmly set; the nose straight and somewhat hooked; the cheeks rather sunken and sparsely bearded. A faint glow of excitement, however, instantly changes the expression: it becomes alert, volatile, all alive—a face to dare any thing, to plunge into danger from mere love of it, and yet not a labor-loving face, nor one capable of sustained effort in any direction not attended with the excitement of physical risk.

This type of countenance pervades the camp more or less. It assumes its deepest tints in the old hunters, degenerating into a haggard, reckless air, and finds its mildest phase in the newly-fledged buffalo-runner, about whose eyes the inevitable marks are but beginning to form. It is not, perhaps, so much the danger that paints these lines of life in sombre hues upon the face, as the wild, reckless racing and slaughter of the final chase—a chase leading for miles, and extending through long hours, keeping nerve, muscle, and mind, at their utmost ten-

sion, and all bent upon slaughter. But, whatever the cause, certain it is that no class of men more distinctly marked by the characteristics of their vocation exist than the members of this hunt. Even the women assume, after a time, the reckless air of their husbands and brothers engaged in it.

The most positive, perhaps, of the recognized laws regulating the camp of rendezvous is that forbidding the departure of any one from its limits after having once entered it. This is to guard against covering the plains with straggling bands of hunters whose presence would inevitably drive the buffalo from their usual range. By reason of this self-imposed law, no one attemps to leave the main body until all the hunters have arrived—an event which generally occurs within a week from the first formation of the camp. During that period the time is passed much in the fashion above described, and, as a consequence of so continuous a series of dissipations, all are eager to break camp and start upon the long journey. The day previous to that appointed for departure, however, is set apart for the election of the officers of the hunt, and the transaction of such other business as the exigencies of the time suggest.

By this date the hunters are supposed to be all in, and prepared as well as they ever will be for departure. The encampment has swollen almost beyond available limits, and become dissipated and unruly to a degree. From two thousand to twenty-five hundred carts line the banks; three thousand animals graze within sight upon the prairie; one thousand men, with their following of women and children, find shelter

under carts, and in the tents and *tepees* of the encampment; the smoke of the camp-fires almost obscures the sun; and the Babel of sounds arising from the laughing, neighing, barking multitude, resembles the rush of many waters.

Immediately after breakfast of the day previous to that appointed for departure from the rendezvous, all the males of the camp repair to a point a short distance off upon the prairie, where gathered in a huge circle, they proceed to the election of officers for the coming hunt. The votes are given first for a chief, who shall see that all laws are enforced, and shall have the power of settling all disputes. To this office is almost invariably elected an old hunter, prominent both on account of experience and executive ability, and for whose comparatively exemplary life all entertain respect. The second ballot elects twelve counselors who, with the chief, make the laws, decide the direction of travel, and advise the executive in all matters of doubtful propriety. These persons, being necessarily men of experience, are chosen also from the elderly men of the camp, or those who have followed plain-hunting for many years. The third ballot is cast for the election of four captains, each of whom will command a certain number of men, called soldiers, who become the police of the hunt, mounting guard against Indians, arranging the shape of the camp—an outer circle formed of carts, inside of which the tents and animals are placed—keeping watch over private property, arresting offenders, etc. These four men must be of a determined mould, and are chosen from the middle-aged hunters whose courage and vigilance are ap-

proved. Lastly, four guides are elected, who are to lead the train in the direction indicated by the chief and counselors. This position, involving a thorough knowledge of the country, is always filled from the ranks of the older hunters, whose many years of service have rendered them acquainted with every foot of the territory to be traversed. With this last office the election terminates.

Before the crowd disperses, the chief and counselors have framed a code of laws which is to govern the multitude during the period covered by the hunt. This code varies a little, perhaps, in phraseology from year to year, but is generally of the following substance:

1. No running of buffalo is permitted on the Sabbath-day.

2. No member of the hunt to lag behind, go before, or fork off from the main body, unless by special permission of the chief.

3. No person or party to run buffalo before the general order is given, in which the entire hunt may participate.

4. Every captain, with his men, to patrol the camp in turn, in order that a continual watch may be kept.

Penalties.—For the first offence, the saddle and bridle of the offender to be cut up.

2. The offender to have his coat cut up.

3. The offender to be publicly flogged.

Any penalty is foregone, however, if the guilty party pay a stipulated sum in money, meat, or robes, for each offence.

In case of theft the perpetrator is to be taken to the mid-

dle of the camp, his name called aloud thrice, the word "thief" being added.

The election having furnished the hunt with the requisite officers, and a code of laws providing for all the necessities and emergencies incident to its nomadic life, the huge encampment begins at once to feel their salutary effect. By eventide the soldiers are selected from the numbers of the young men, and a relief patrols the camp—for the laws are enforced from the moment of their enactment. The effect is perceptible in the lessened confusion, the cessation of public drinking and gambling, and a general air of order and routine. The dissipation of the past week is replaced by attention to the details of the coming journey. Everything is made ready for an early departure on the morrow. The chief and his counselors assemble in the centre of the camp and discuss the most advisable route to pursue; the council being open to outsiders having suggestions to offer. The captains of the guard pass through the camp in all directions, issuing orders as to the disposition of animals, carts, and baggage, in such manner as to afford the best facilities for easy and rapid loading. Play-day is over, and the real business of the hunt begins. After the lapse of a night which, in its quietude, forms a violent contrast with the seven or more preceding it, the camp of rendezvous is broken up, and the caravan begins to move.

The fortunate traveler who, standing upon the edge of the Sahara, has seen a caravan trailing out into the barren and interminable sand-dunes of the desert, the main body

tortuous and serpentine, the fast-disappearing head swaying to and fro in the dim distance, has but few features of the scene to change in depicting the departure of this mongrel hunt for the barren buffalo-ranges of the plains. With the first gleam of morning, before the mists have lifted from the river, the flag of the guide is raised and the huge train starts upon its way. One by one the carts fall into line, following each other in single file, until the last vehicle has left the camp of rendezvous. The train is now five miles in length, its width varying from half a mile to a mile, as the press of loose animals is greater or less. The creaking of the loose cart-frames, the screech of ungreased axles, the shouts of wild riders as they dash along the length of the train or off upon the prairie in quest of some stray animal, the neighing of horses, the lowing of kine, make a pandemonium of sounds that may be heard miles away upon the plain. At the extreme front rides a staid guide bearing a white flag, which when raised, indicates a continuance of the march, and, when lowered, the signal to halt and camp. About this standard-bearer move, with grave demeanor, as becomes those charged with important trusts, the old chief and counselors of the hunt.

Along the line of march are scattered the four captains of the guard, who, with their men, keep order in the line. Here rides on a sleek runner the average hunter, in corduroy and capote, bronzed, sparsely bearded, volatile, and given to much gesticulation; next, an Indian, pure and simple, crouched upon the back of his shaggy, unkempt pony, with-

out saddle, and using a single cord as bridle—a blanketed, hatless, "grave and reverend seignior," speaking but seldom, and then only in monosyllables; then a sandy-haired and canny Scot, clad in homespun, and with keen grey eyes wide open for the main chance, eager for trade, but reckless and daring as any hunter of them all, bestriding a large-boned, well-accoutred animal, and riding it like a heavy dragoon; here, again, a pink-cheeked sprig of English nobility, doing the hunt from curiosity, and carefully watched over by a numerous retinue of servants and retainers. He has in his outfit all the latest patterns of arms, the most comprehensive of camp-chests, and *impedimenta* enough for a full company of plain-hunters. From every covered cart in the long train peer the dusky faces of Phyllis and Thisbe, sometimes chatting gayly with the tawny cavaliers riding alongside; again, engaged in quieting the demonstrations of a too lively progeny. In the bottom of every tenth vehicle, stretched upon its back in the soft folds of a robe or tent, and kicking its tiny pink heels skyward, lies the ever-present baby—a laughing, crowing, dusky infant, clad in the costume of the Greek slave, and apparently impervious to the chill air of the early morning. Scattered about among the throng of marching animals ride the boys, servants, and younger men, engaged in keeping the long line in motion. Everywhere there is a glint of polished gun-barrels, a floating of party-colored sashes, a reckless careering to and fro, a wild dash and scurry, a waving of blankets, shouts, dust, noise, and confusion.

As the day advances, the march becomes more toilsome.

The prairie, freed from the morning dews and heated by the sun, sends up dense clouds of dust from beneath the tramping hoofs, half concealing the long caravan. Oftentimes the trail passes over immense tracts ravaged by prairie-fires, where the earth presents naught save the dense coating of black ashes. In this event the train is likely to be completely enshrouded in the penetrating dust, filling mouths, ears, and eyes, with its pungent particles, and discoloring everything it touches. Animals and men suffer alike, and the cooling, if not crystal, waters of the streams and creeks crossing the line of march occasion a general rush for relief. To avoid a long-continued trailing of dust—which bids fair to suffocate the rear end of the train in the event of a slight wind blowing, as is nearly always the case upon the prairie—the caravan is frequently divided into four or five columns, marching parallel with one another, each column nearly a mile in length. When the march assumes this form, as it nearly always does when the lay of the prairie permits, its picturesque aspect deepens, and progress becomes more rapid. It seems like the serried ranks of an invading army advancing with slow but certain steps. The centre column then becomes the guide, and at its head the flag of march is held aloft.

With the exception of a short halt at noon, when no attempt at camping is made, the columns merely halting in line and loosing the animals for the hour during which dinner is prepared, the march continues in this monotonous but picturesque fashion until an early hour in the evening, when the

flag of the guide is lowered and the train forms the night-camp. One by one the carts wheel into a vast circle, oft-times two and three deep, the trains of each vehicle pointing inward, until the complete figure is formed. The animals, after being loosed, are turned out upon the prairie until toward night, when they are again driven within the circle. Another smaller line, following that of the carts and leaving a considerable space between the two for the reception of the animals, is formed by the tents, each with its camp-fire burning before it. Directly in the centre of the camp are pitched the *tepees* of the chief and counselors, in order to be readily accessible for consultation at all times. The camp is at once efficiently policed, and the best of order prevails. The tramp of the day produces its natural effect, and, after supper and the usual season of fumigation, the bustle and confusion attendant upon so vast a collection of men and animals die out. A little knot of the older hunters perhaps linger in consultation about the central camp-fire for a time; but soon naught is heard save the tramping of horses and oxen, or the startled exclamations of some sleeper suddenly aroused by the unceremonious entrance of a wandering animal into his tent. Not even the vigilant guard is to be seen; but let any one attempt to leave the camp, and shadowy figures will arise like magic from the grass without the circle, barring his further progress.

At earliest dawn the march is again resumed; the incidents of one day being but a repetition of that preceding, if we except Sunday. No law of the code, perhaps, is less

seldom violated than that governing the observance of this day, so far as it applies to the labors of the hunt. The letter of the law is strictly observed: no buffalo are run; but of its further observance?—well, let us see.

The camp of Saturday night is located, if possible, contiguous to a plentiful supply of water, and amid an abundance of buffalo-chips, which have long since taken the place of wood as fuel. The Sunday breakfast is apt to be a late one, and eaten at leisure. Immediately after it, however, the entire camp moves as one man a short distance upon the prairie. It frequently happens that a priest is with the party; if not, an acolyte celebrates a kind of open-air mass, the whole assembly kneeling with uncovered heads upon the level plain during its continuance. The devotions are apparently heartfelt and solemn; the rattling of beads, the muttering of prayers, and the louder response, alone breaking the Sabbath stillness. No Christian church in the city presents a more devout and chastened aspect. The wild, reckless, swearing hunter of an hour before has become a penitent soul, counting his beads with a look of pathetic prayerfulness affecting to behold. The services continue an hour or more, but the devout assembly stirs not. The sun gleams down upon uncovered heads, and glances into unprotected eyes, powerless to distract attention from the mass. Thus did the warlike Crusaders pause amid their tempestuous lives to call upon the source of all blessings; so did the Israelites in the wilderness, bearing about the Ark of the Covenant. The plain-hunter's devoutness arises in a measure, however, from the fact of

having to pray for all the rest of the week; for on the intervening six days his language is anything but that of prayer. All things have an end, and so finally has the mass, for which the assembly seem more than ever to be thankful, and betake themselves to camp again for dinner.

The afternoon is not given to devotion. It has happened on the evenings of the previous march that François, or Pascal, or Pierre, has paraded the camp, shouting in stentorian tones, "I, Pierre, challenge François to race his bay horse against my grey, the stakes to be horse against horse!" or, "I, Antoine, challenge the camp to race against my roan for an ox and cart!" These challenges have been accepted, hands shaken in confirmation of the agreement, and the race appointed to take place the following Sunday afternoon. So it occurs that a sufficient number of races are on the *tapis* to occupy the entire time.

The chief is now, by virtue of his office, the umpire, and lends his presence to render the sport legitimate and of acknowledged character. What was once governed by individual honor is now enforced by law. The counselors take places at either end of the course as judges. The police are present to preserve order and enforce the decisions of the judges. The camp turns out *en masse* in holiday attire to witness the sport, and all is excitement, gesticulation, shouting, and confusion. The wagers rapidly change hands; ponies and carts multiply upon the fortunate winner; favorite runners are lost to others whose almost sole dependence rested upon them. Many having lost ponies, oxen, carts, and runners, by racing or

gambling, now stake their own services as servants upon the issue of a final race, and accept defeat with the philosophy of stoics. The excitement engended by the sports of the afternoon follows the hunter on his return to camp, and the day which began with prayer and devotion terminates in clamor, quarreling, and drink, if obtainable. More license prevails than is allowed upon other days, and, morally considered, the time had been far better passed in the usual occupations of the hunt.

As the hunt approaches the scene of its labors scouts are daily sent out to ascertain, if possible, the direction in which the large herds of buffalo are feeding. No attention is paid to the small bands that are encountered from day to day, and firing at them is strictly forbidden. The object is to encounter the main herds, when all the hunters may participate in the chase with equal chances of success. The longing for fresh meat, however, becomes at times too much for half-breed endurance, and to gain the coveted morsel, and avoid infringing the law, an amusing method of capture is resorted to.

Two active hunters, taking in their hands the long lines of raw-hide, called "shagnappe," isolate a cow from the herd. Then, seizing either end of the line, they proceed to revolve about their victim in opposite directions, so entwining her legs in the folds of the cord as to throw her to the ground by the very struggles she makes to escape. Once down, a few dexterous twists of the line secure her head, and a knife finishes the work. This sport furnishes considerable excitement, and is much affected as a relief from the monotony of the

daily jog. Then, too, it supplies what is likely to be by this time a much-needed article—food. Strange as it may appear, the improvident plain-hunter scarcely ever begins his journey with a stock of provisions sufficient to last until the buffalo are reached. And all the lessons taught by years of experience and semi-annual privation and suffering have failed to impress him with the necessity of a more ample supply. Four or five days out from the camp of rendezvous, frequently in less time, half the train is invariably destitute of food. But little appearance of it, however, is presented to the spectator. The volatile hunter laughs and jokes and starves with a *sang-froid* truly admirable. For all that, he borrows of his neighbor, begs piteously for his children, or, when absolutely forced to it, kills a pony or ox to replace the provision he might easily have brought. Before this stage is reached, however, in nearly every covered cart of the line may be heard children crying for food, and wives pleading for the means of satisfying them.

At length the scouts, who for days have been scouring the prairie in every direction, bring the welcome intelligence of the discovery of the main herds. The line of march is at once turned toward the point indicated, and the laws against firing and leaving the main body are rigidly enforced. The long train moves cautiously and as silently as possible. Advantage is taken of depressions in the prairie to keep the train concealed from the buffalo, and not a sound is raised that may give warning of its presence. Approach is made as closely as may be compatible with safety, always keeping to the windward of the herd. Then, if a convenient locality is

reached, camp is made, and busy preparations for the ensuing hunt begin. Guns are carefully scanned, powder-flasks and bullet-pouches filled, saddles and bridles examined, and, above all, the horses to be used in the final chase carefully groomed, for highest among his possessions the plain-hunter ranks his "buffalo-runner." It is to him like the Arab's steed—a daily comrade to be petted and spoken to, the companion of his long journeys, and the means of his livelihood.

The buffalo-runner belongs to no particular breed, the only requisites being speed, tact in bringing his rider alongside the retreating herd and maintaining a certain relative distance while there, and the avoiding the numerous pitfalls with which the prairie abounds. Horses well trained in these duties, and possessing the additional requisite of speed, command high prices in the hunt, often ranging from fifty to eighty pounds sterling. On the hunt they are seldom used for any other purpose than that of the final race, except it may be to occasionally draw the cart of madame at times when her neighbor appears in unwonted attire.

Before daybreak on the following morning—for a chase is seldom begun late in the day—the great body of hunters are off under the guidance of scouts in pursuit of the main herd. A ride of an hour or more brings them within, say, a mile of the buffalo, which have been moving slowly off as they approached. The hunt up to this time has moved in four columns, with every man in his place. As they draw nearer at a gentle trot, the immense herd breaks into a rolling gallop. Now the critical and long-desired moment has arrived. The

chief gives the signal. "Allee! allee!" he shouts, and a thousand reckless riders dash forward at a wild run. Into the herd they penetrate; along its sides they stretch, the trained horses regulating their pace to that of the moving mass beside them; guns flash, shots and yells resound; the dust arises in thick clouds over the struggling band; and the chase sweeps rapidly over the plain, leaving its traces behind in the multitude of animals lying dead upon the ground, or feebly struggling in their death-throes. The hunter pauses not a moment, but loads and fires with the utmost rapidity, pouring in his bullets at the closest range, often almost touching the animal he aims at. To facilitate the rapidity of his fire he uses a flint-lock, smooth-bore trading-gun, and enters the chase with his mouth filled with bullets. A handful of powder is let fall from the powder-horn, a bullet is dropped from the mouth into the muzzle, a tap with the butt-end of the firelock on the saddle causes the salivated bullet to adhere to the powder during the moment necessary to depress the barrel, when the discharge is instantly effected without bringing the gun to the shoulder.

The excitement which seizes upon the hunter at finding himself surrounded by the long-sought buffalo is intense, and sometimes renders him careless in examining too closely whether the object fired at is a buffalo or a buffalo-runner mounted by a friend. But few fatal accidents occur, however, from the pell-mell rush and indiscriminate firing; but it frequently happens that guns, as the result of hasty and careless loading, explode, carrying away part of the hands

using them, and even the most expert runners sometimes find their way into badger-holes, breaking or dislocating the collar-bones of the riders in the fall.

The identification of the slain animals is left till the run is over. This is accomplished by means of marked bullets, the locality in which the buffalo lies—for which the hunter always keeps a sharp lookout—and the spot where the bullet entered. By the time the hunters begin to appear, returning from the chase, there have arrived long trains of carts from the camp to carry back the meat and robes. The animals having been identified, the work of skinning and cutting up begins, in which the women and children participate. In a remarkably brief time the plain is strewed with skeletons stripped of flesh, and the well-loaded train is on its return. Arrived at camp, the robes are at once stretched upon a frame-work of poles, and the greater part of the flesh scraped from them, after which they are folded and packed in the carts to receive the final dressing in the settlement. Of the meat, the choicest portions are packed away without further care, to be freighted home in a fresh state, the cold at that late season effectually preserving it. Large quantities are, however, converted into pemmican, in which shape it finds its readiest market.

Pemmican forms the principal product of the summer buffalo-hunt, when, to preserve from decay the vast quantities of meat taken, some artificial process is necessary. A large amount is also made in the earlier part of the autumn hunt. To manufacture pemmican the flesh of the buffalo is first cut

up into large lumps, and then again into flakes or thin slices, and hung up in the sun or over the fire to dry. When it is thoroughly desiccated it is taken down, placed upon raw-hides spread out upon the prairie, and pounded or beaten sometimes by wooden flails, again between two stones, until the meat is reduced to a thick, flaky substance or pulp. Bags made of buffalo hide, with the hair on the outside, about the size of an ordinary pillow or flour-sack, say two feet long, one and a half feet wide and eight inches thick, are standing ready, and each one is half filled with the powdered meat. The tallow or fat of the buffalo, having been boiled by itself in a huge cauldron, is now poured hot into the oblong bag in which the pulverized meat has previously been placed. The contents are then stirred together until they have been thoroughly mixed ; the dry pulp being soldered down into a hard solid mass by the melted fat poured over it. When full the bags are sewed up as tightly as possible, and the pemmican allowed to cool. Each bag weighs one hundred pounds, the quantity of fat being nearly half the total weight, the whole composition forming the most solid description of food that man can make. It is the traveling provision used throughout the Fur Land, where, in addition to its already specified qualifications, its great facility of transportation renders it extremely valuable. There is no risk of spoiling it, as, if ordinary care be taken to keep the bags free from mould, there is no assignable limit to the time pemmican will keep. It is estimated that, on an average, the carcasses of two buffaloes are required to make one bag of pemmican—one filling the

bag itself, the other supplying the wants of the wild savage engaged in hunting it down.

It is only of late years that pemmican has come into public notice as a condensed food valuable to the commissariat upon long expeditions. Hitherto it has been a provision peculiar to the Fur Land, and particularly to the service of the Hudson's Bay Company. Notwithstanding the vast annual slaughter of buffalo south of the forty-ninth parallel, no pemmican is made there; the meat being used in the fresh or green state, or in the form of jerked beef. The pemmican of the English Arctic expeditions differs from the real article in being made of beef mixed with raisins and spices, and preserved from decay by being hermetically sealed. Buffalo pemmican may be said to keep itself, requiring no spices or seasoning for its preservation, and may be kept in any vessel and under any conditions, except that of dampness, for unlimited time. It is one of the most perfect forms of condensed food known, and is excelled by no other provision in its satisfying quality. The amount of it used throughout the territory is almost incredible, as, besides the enormous quantity consumed in the company's service, it appears, when attainable, upon the table of every half-breed in the country. So essential is it to the wants of the *voyageurs*, as the staple article of food upon the long voyages made in the transportation service of the company, that its manufacture is stimulated in every way by the agents of that corporation, and every available pound is bought up for its use. Until a comparatively late year, it

was the only article embraced in the trade-lists for which liquor was bartered.

Another form of provision, also the product of the summer hunt and extensively used, is dried meat. In its manufacture the flesh of the buffalo undergoes the same treatment as in the preparatory stages of pemmican-making—when it has been cut into thin slices it is hung over a fire, smoked and cured. It resembles sole-leather very much in appearance. After being thoroughly dried, it is packed into bales weighing about sixty pounds each, and shipped all over the territory.

The serious decrease in the number of buffalo, which has been observed year by year, threatens to produce a very disastrous effect upon the provision trade of the country; and the time can not be far distant when some new provision must be found to take the place of the old. We recollect very well when pemmican, which now can be procured with difficulty for one shilling and three pence a pound, could be had at two pence, and dried meat formerly costing two pence now costs ten pence. This is a fact which threatens to revolutionize in a manner the whole business of the territory, but more particularly the transport service of the company.

The camp, which has for days been on the verge of starvation, after the return of the hunters from the chase becomes a scene of feasting and revelry; and gastronomic feats are performed which seem incredible to those unacquainted with the appetite begotten of a roving life, unlimited fresh air, and the digestible nature of the food. As with the daughters of

the horse-leech, there is a continued demand for more, until the consumption of tongues, melting hump, and dripping ribs, bids fair to threaten the entire camp with immediate asphyxia. All night long the feasting continues among the groups formed about the camp-fires, and roasting, boiling, and stewing are the order of the hour. Were the supply certain to be exhausted on the morrow, the consumption would go on just the same, the improvident hunter entertaining no idea of reserving of present excess for future scarcity. Happily, the supply is abundant, for it sometimes happens that the carts are fully loaded with meat in a single chase. In that event, the major part of them are at once started homeward in charge of boys and the younger men, while the hunters follow up the herd to obtain a further supply of robes. A view of the prairie, after a run in which the acquisition of robes is the sole object, reveals the enormous waste of life which annually occurs. The plain for miles is covered with the carcasses of buffalo from which nothing has been taken save the hides, tongues, and it may be the more savory portions of the hump; the remainder being left to the wolves and carrion-birds. Should the first run fail to secure a sufficient supply of meat, however, the chase is continued until the complement is obtained, each hunter starting his carts homeward as they are filled.

In such manner has the work of the semi-annual hunts been conducted for over half a century, and in the same way will it continue, growing less in importance yearly, until the last buffalo shall have ceased to exist. Their importance in

the years gone by can hardly be over-estimated. They have furnished the main support of a population numbering ten thousand souls, and furnished the trade with a great part of its annual supplies of robes and furs. An enterprising and flourishing province is springing up about the site of the little colony of hunters, rendered all the more easy of establishment by the stability and wealth derived from the chase. But, unfortunately, the older nomads are crowded by this civilization. They belong to a race apart, and are scared by fences and enclosures, as if they confined even the free air within bounds and limits. Gradually they retire before it, following the buffalo closer and closer to the Rocky Mountains, until finally both will disappear together.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FRATERNITY OF MEDICINE-MEN.

TO the traveler detained long at a trading-post of the Hudson's Bay Company, the monotony of the existence becomes irksome in the extreme. The scenery about the stockade is generally limited to a boundless view of the level prairie on three sides, and a meagre one of the river on whose banks it stands. The daily routine of life within the walls, which contributes to distract the attention of the post officials, comes to have an appalling sameness to the mere looker-on. It is then that the consumption of tobacco becomes something alarming, and that the mind grasps at the most trivial incident as a means of appeasing its weariness. The fit of one's moccasins is a matter to be thought seriously about, and the composition of one's dinner is a subject of deep contemplation.

This hibernal torpor, as it may be called, generally sets in more acutely in the autumnal months, when the increasing cold half locks the rivers in ice, forbidding the use of canoe or boat, and drives the sportsman from the plains with its frigid breath. It continues with but little cessation until midwinter, when trappers and Indians arrive with the first of the winter's catch of furs. True, there are occasional

times of bustle, created by the arrivals and departures which constantly take place in a country where locomotion may be said to be the normal condition of the people. But this temporary excitement only serves to plunge one into corresponding depths of depression when it is over, and the sameness of the life afterward becomes absolutely funereal. Everything readable in the scanty library is read so often that it seems to one as if he could close his eyes and repeat the whole collection *verbatim*; the acquaintance of all the live-stock is cultivated until one may be said to possess the intimacy of every dog and cat in the post, and the autobiographies of all the officers and servants are heard so repeatedly that one feels competent to reproduce them in manuscript in the event of their decease.

Fortunately, during this season of inactivity occurs the annual celebration of a festival peculiar to a mystic brotherhood permeating the nomadic peoples round about. Each autumn the fraternity of medicine-men celebrate the dog-feast in the vicinity of the principal trading-stations.

An inclosure about forty feet long by twenty-five broad, fenced in with branches of trees, is laid off on the prairie. It is situated due east and west, and has an opening in either end for purposes of entrance and exit. The ceremony occupies two or three days, during which the ground in the interior of the inclosure is covered with savages, who sit alongside each other, drawn up close inside the fence. In a line running lengthways through the centre are erected perpendicular poles, with large stones at their bases, both stones

and poles covered red over different portions of their surfaces by the blood of the dog-sacrifice. The animals are selected and killed, and, after lying exposed on the stones beside the poles during the performance of certain ceremonies by the medicine-men—whose medicine-bags, composed of the skins of wild animals, form an important feature of the ceremony—are cooked and eaten. The dog-meat, when prepared, presents a very uncouth and repulsive appearance, as it is borne from man to man in shapeless trenchers that each may select the portion he intends to devour.

To the casual spectator such a ceremony as the dog-feast seems a confused conglomeration of frivolous rites and genuflections, destitute alike of meaning and design. One might be tempted to believe that the principal and most rational object of the assemblage was to eat the dogs. Inquiry, however, of any well-informed resident of the country, elicits the reply that the unfortunate beings are assembled for what, in their eyes, is the celebration of a solemn act of communion with the spirits. That such communion is real has been believed, to our knowledge, by many clergymen and priests in the Indian country, though, of course, their theory is that it exists with the powers of darkness. It probably lies much with the accidental bias of each man's mind, whether he inclines to so serious a view of these barbarous proceedings, or mentally attributes to them much the same amount of spiritual efficacy which he would to the fantastic contortions of some Eastern devotee.

The nominal object of this feast is to make medicine.

What medicine this is, we are unable to state with precision. The Indians have many medicines, composed for the most part of roots, and sometimes possessed of real medicinal virtue. Sarsaparilla, for instance, is used by them. Some are said to be highly poisonous, and even to exercise what we presume would to a physician appear an unaccountable effect. The permanent contortion of feature, the growth of hair over the entire body, the eruption of black, ineffaceble blotches on the skin, are alleged to be the consequences of partaking of some of them, either by swallowing or inhaling their fumes. Frequent examples of the results above cited have come under our own personal observation, and we can vouch for the effect produced.

There was employed at one time, as a servant in the family, a Salteaux girl, of about twenty years of age. As a natural result of her presence about the establishment, numerous Indians of both sexes, claiming ties of consanguinity of more or less remoteness, daily besieged the culinary department of our domestic economy. The matter became unbearable, finally, as it often occurred that the kitchen-floor was nearly covered with the squatting relatives. The girl was ordered to refuse admittance to any being, of either sex, habited in a blanket. It happened that the first candidate presenting himself for admittance after the receipt of this prohibitory order was an old conjurer, or medicine-man. The door was unceremoniously shut in his face. He lingered about, however, until some duty called the girl outside the door, when, after threatening her with dire revenge, he took his departure.

The poor domestic was much alarmed, and reported his threats. Little attention was paid to it, and the winter passed away without a further call from the conjurer.

In the early spring, the girl by some accident cut her hand slightly—not sufficiently deep, however, to necessitate binding up. Before it healed, she was one day engaged in carrying water from an adjacent stream, when the conjurer unexpectedly approached her. Professing to have forgotten his ejection of the previous winter, he proffered his hand in a friendly way to the girl, who thoughtlessly gave him in return the wounded member. He shook it a long time, squeezing it tightly in his own. The sore smarted considerably, and upon withdrawing her hand by reason of the pain, she noticed some dark substance in the palm of the conjurer's hand. The thought then occurred to her that he had poisoned the sore. She was assured of it by the medicine-man, who informed her that she would break out in black blotches for one month in each year, ever afterward. One year from that date black eruptions appeared over her entire body, each spot about the size of a dime silver coin. They continued upon her person, without any severe pain, for one month, when they disappeared. For three successive years —as long as we had knowledge of her—the eruptions occurred regularly, and continued for the allotted time.

Among the visiting Indians who called perennially at our kitchen-door during the winter months, was a middle-aged woman suffering from a loss of power to move the facial muscles. This incapacity was brought on, according to her

own testimony, and that of others cognizant of the circumstances, some five years before our first acquaintance with her, by certain drugs administered by a conjurer. These medicines were given her to produce that effect alone, without reference to the prevention or cure of other diseases, and were taken without her knowledge, being mingled surreptitiously with her food. The effect soon showed itself in a total loss of power in the facial muscles. She became as expressionless as a mask. Only the eyes moved; and, as they were intensely black and rather sparkling eyes, the ghastly deformity was rendered the more glaring. The most singular effect was produced, however, by her laugh. She was a jolly, good-natured squaw, and laughed upon the slightest provocation. Her eyes sparkled, and her "Ha! ha!" was musical to a degree; but not a muscle moved to denote the merriment on that expressionless face. One felt that some one else laughed behind that rigid integument, and was fain to pull it off, and see the dimples and curves it concealed. The sensation was that of being in the presence of an enigma one could not comprehend. No idea could be formed of what she thought at any time; but when she waxed merry her countenance was more than ever a death-mask.

As to the growth of hair over the body, we have heard of but one instance of it. That was an old man from a tribe dwelling in the swamps and marshes. He was entirely covered with a thick coating of hair nearly an inch in length. Only about the eyes was there any diminution in the quantity, where for nearly an inch in a circle there was no hair. He

attributed the phenomenon to a decoction of certain herbs given him by a medicine-man whom he had mortally offended. His family, so far as we heard of them, were innocent of any hirsute covering.

In a family of three Cree Indians of advanced age, a sister and two brothers, named respectively Sallie, Creppe, and Hornie, living near Fort Pelly, perhaps the strangest effects of the medicine-man's drugs appeared. These old people had been poisoned in early youth, with a different effect in each case. Sallie, who was a hanger-on about the kitchen, lost the nails of her fingers and toes regularly every year at the season when birds moult their feathers. This phenomenon had never failed to occur annually since the medicine had been taken in infancy. There was but little pain connected with this shedding of the nails, and they soon grew out again. Her brother Creppe was afflicted with an eruption of warts over his entire person, and was altogether as hideous a looking object as could well be imagined. The divisions of his fingers and toes were hidden by these monstrous excrescences; from his ears depended warts nearly an inch in length; in fact, he was covered with them all over except his eyes. At certain seasons of the year they became very painful, and deprived him of the power of locomotion.

But in the case of Hornie—a name conferred by some facetious Scotch trader, in allusion to a fancied resemblance to his Satanic majesty—the effects of the poison were of quite another character. Hornie's hair was simply changed from a generally deep black to alternate streaks of black and white.

These streaks were about an inch in width, and ran from the forehead to the back of the head. The line of demarcation between the two colors was very abrupt and distinct; the white color being the purest that can be imagined. There was no gradual merging from iron-grey to grey, thence to white; it was the whiteness of unsullied snow throughout the streak. And it never changed.

We do not feel that strangers to the subject of which we write will receive these incidents with the confidence which they deserve, nor even that those who are somewhat familiar with the actual circumstances will admit every inference to be drawn to be the living truth; but our own assurance is so clear and strong that we can only judge the critic by his judgment of it. We know what we assert, and are upon honor with the reader.

Medical gentlemen in the country have differed in their opinions as to the ability of Indians to cause the above-described symptoms; and, so far as we can gather, the subject is a difficult one, and resolves itself more into a question of evidence of facts than of the medicinal property of the roots and drugs.

We were once furnished an opportunity of examining at our leisure the contents of many medicine-bags at a certain Indian mission station in the northern country. These bags had formerly been the property of sundry medicine-men, who, on their conversion to Christianity, had transferred them to the keeping of the reverend missionary. There was a large collection of them thrown promiscuously upon the floor of a

small out-building. The bags were, for the most part, formed of the skins of various wild beasts in embryotic state, taken off whole, and so stuffed as to retain as much as possible the natural position of the animal. They had evidently served as the totems of the owners. The contents of these primitive medicine-chests were as varied as the most enthusiastic *curio* could desire. Each article was wrapped carefully in a separate parcel by itself, with the inner bark of the birch-tree, and duly labeled as to its contents with totemic symbols. An unwrapping of these packages resulted in the discovery of an extensive assortment of ingredients. There were dried herbs of many different varieties—bark and leaves of strange plants and trees; white and orange-colored powders of the finest quality, and evidently demanding skill in their preparation; claws of animals and talons of birds; colored feathers and beaks; a few preserved skins and teeth of reptiles; but a total absence of liquids or any vessels that could be used to carry them. There were several plants, packages of which were found in every bag; but the majority differed greatly, and the *materia medica* of each practitioner seemed to be the result of individual choice and research. One thing, however, was common to all—the small package of human finger and toe nails. Of what peculiar signification they were, or used in what malady, we are unable to state.

Among the other contents of the medicine-bags, and common to all, were small images of wood, the presence of which was considered essential to the proper efficacy of the drugs.

This was the real totem which presided over the effectual use of the ingredients, and represented the guardian spirit of the owner. The Indians believe every animal to have had a great original or father. The first buffalo, the first bear, the first beaver, the first eagle, etc., was the Manitou or guardian spirit of the whole race of these different creatures. They chose some one of these originals as their special Manitou, or guardian; and hence arose the custom of having its representation as the totem of an entire tribe. But the medicine-men being, as it were, the priests of the spirits, and mediums between them and the world, are entitled to a special guardian spirit of their own, and hence carry his totem among their drugs. As they profess to heal through the direction of this spirit or guardian, they very properly place his image among the means he commands to be used.

These images were, as a matter of course, of limited size and rough workmanship. Their designs were various, and represented different animals, birds, reptiles, the human figure in strange attitudes, the sun and moon, and combinations of all these in many forms. Whatever they held to be superior to themselves, they deified; but they never exalted it much above humanity, and these images never betrayed the expression of a conception of a supernatural being on the part of their owners.

But, whatever may have been the value of the contents of these medicine-bags, certain it is that a fraternity of medicine-men exists among the Indians, and that those without its pale look with great awe upon the power of its members.

The latter are the great actors in the dog-feasts. They make medicine for the recovery of the sick, who apply for their assistance, and initiate novices into the mysteries of the fraternity. In payment for each exercise of these offices, a remuneration of some value is required; the charges being, like those of many of the medical profession, in proportion to the wealth of the patient. In many cases it happens that, through a pretty thorough knowledge of the virtues of certain herbs, a firm determination on the part of the sufferer not to die, and a constitution inured to noxious lotions of every kind, the medicine-man effects a curé. Some of his cures and specifics are wonderful, too.

We recall to memory a certain buffalo-hunt in which we once participated, accompanying a French-Indian family. Among the members of this nomadic domestic circle was a young woman about nineteen years of age, and of very strong *physique*. It happened one day that, in drawing a loaded shot-gun from the cart by the muzzle, the charge exploded, and passed entirely through her body in the region of the chest. The gun being not over twenty inches distant from her person when discharged, the shot left a hole through which one's finger could be thrust. We were tented on the plain, hundreds of miles from settlements, and totally destitute alike of medical knowledge and remedies. The girl was given up for lost, of course. Near our own camp, however, were a few lodges of Indians, and among them, as usual, a medicine-man. The report of the accident soon reaching the Indian *tepees*, this conjurer stalked over to our tents, and looked

without comment for a time upon the unskilled efforts being made for the sufferer's relief. At length he addressed the father of the girl, offering to cure her if she was intrusted to his care. Clutching at this straw, in the absence of any better thing, with the girl's consent the father accepted the proposal; and the patient was transferred to the lodge of the medicine-man. Strange as it may appear, the woman recovered after a time, under the drugs and care of the conjurer, and was able to return home with us at the termination of the hunt. We saw her some years after, and she expressed herself as enjoying perfect health. The payment for effecting this cure was, if we recollect aright, two Indian ponies, which, it is needless to say, were cheerfully paid.

On his initiation into the mysteries of the brotherhood, the candidate, besides paying the medicine-men a fair price, must be a man known to the adepts as eligible. This eligibility consists, it has been contended, in physical perfection alone; but, having known conjurers who were deformed from birth, and others maimed at the time of their initiation, we incline to the opinion that mental characteristics are those most closely examined. A certain dignity of appearance, a severe and mysterious manner, and a more than usual taciturnity and secretiveness in the candidate, are favorably considered. Different tribes, however, or, it may be, different schools of medicine, have their distinct methods of initiation.

The most curious initial ceremony coming to our knowledge was that of a tribe in the far North. The candidate

was required to repair to the forests for a certain number of days, to be passed in fasting, until, from extreme physical privation, he should be wrought up to close communion with the spirits. He then returned, and entered the pale of the fence marking the limits of the dog-feast, to be at once surrounded by a circle of conjurers and braves of his tribe, who indulged in a wild dance. In the midst of this dance a live dog (white in color, if to be had) was brought within the circle by the instructing medicine-man, and handed to the novitiate. Seizing the sacrificial canine by the neck and a hind-leg, the candidate finished his initiation by devouring the animal alive. The spectacle of this poor wretch, his face covered with blood, the howls and contortions of the suffering animal, and the yelling, dancing demons, circling about in their monotonous dance, was appalling to the last degree. The dogs consumed were generally of small size, but in some instances large ones were given, and the neophyte was in a gorged and semi-dormant condition at the termination of his repast.

With some few orders of medicine-men physical torture in the initiation obtains. The candidate, to cure others, must be a perfect physical man himself; and, as he may occasion pain to his patients, must be able to endure it without murmur in his own person. At an appointed time he appears before a medicine-man, who cuts four gashes about three inches long on the shoulders near the point. With a smooth stick of hard wood he makes a hole underneath the slits he has cut, taking in an inch or more in width, and through

which a buffalo-thong is passed and tightly tied. Then the breast is served in the same manner. After this one thong is fastened to a long pole, the other to a buffalo-skull, or other heavy weight, with about ten feet of rope between the back and skull. The candidate then jumps into a lively dance, singing a song in keeping with the performance, and jerking the skull about so fast that at times it is four or five feet from the ground, all the time pulling as best he can at the thong fastened to the pole by jumping back and swinging upon it. At times the flesh on back and breast seems to stretch eight or ten inches, and, when let up, closes down again with a pop. This dancing and racing continues until the flesh-fastenings break. The novitiate is by that time a terrible looking object, and so nearly exhausted that he has to be helped away. His wounds are washed and bound up, presents are made to him, and he is thenceforth recognized as a medicine-man.

A fast of ten days' duration has been stated to us, on oral and trustworthy testimony, as a necessary preliminary among some tribes to becoming a conjurer. During the time indicated the candidate sleeps among the branches of a tree, where a temporary residence has been fitted up for him. His dreams are carefully treasured up in his recollection, and he believes that the spirits who are afterward to become his familiars then reveal themselves to him. Indeed, this intent watching for his spiritual familiars is the principal object of his retirement and fast. He is taught to believe in two kinds of spirits, one eminently good, the other emi-

nently evil. But the latter are inferior in power to the former. The good spirits are his guardians and familiars, yet he may use the devices of the evil ones if he so desire Every accident of life with a medicine-man is accounted for by spiritual agency. An amusing incident may serve to show the extent to which this belief may be carried:

A small company of Indians drifted into our premises one winter's day for the purpose of begging provisions. Among the number were several noted conjurers. Some freak of curiosity tempted us to try how far their belief in the supernatural would carry them; and, having a large music-box in our possession, it was wound up and placed unnoticed upon the table. In a moment it began playing, and the notes of "Bonnie Doon," "The Lass o' Gowrie," etc., reverberated through the apartment. At its first chords the faces of the savages assumed a wondering, dazed expression. But, quickly recovering from that phase of amazement, they began to trace the sound to its origin. After some minutes of deep attention, one old man evidently discovered the source, and without a moment's hesitation raised his gun and fired it at the box. It is perhaps unnecessary to mention that the instrument was, to use a nautical expression, "a total wreck." The conjurer asserted that the music was produced by an evil spirit concealed in the box, and could only be driven out by a gunshot. Our curiosity was satisfied, but at a considerable expense.

For whole nights previous to the public and final ceremony of the dog-feast, the principal medicine-man, installed

in his medicine-tent, instructs his pupils. The quaint party is accompanied by an individual who beats the medicine-drum, the monotonous tones of which are kept up during the whole time the lesson continues. What special branch of medical science is instilled into the minds of pupils we do not know. It is probably but a lesson in incantation or some senseless jugglery, intended to awe the candidate; for the medicine-men are acute deceivers, and as despotic and absurd in social life as are the priests and oracles and conjurers of civilized man in another hemisphere.

It has been our good fortune to see some of the tricks performed by the medicine-men, among the most curious of which is one analogous to the celebrated Davenport trick. The conjurer in every instance permitted an inspection of tent and person; he was then securely tied inside the tent and left alone for a moment, when he would appear untied at the door; a moment later he would be tied again. This trick is, in certain localities, quite common among them, and exceedingly well performed. They exhibit also many other feats of jugglery, in themselves very curious and interesting, but not calling for notice here.

An interesting circumstance obtains, however, in their weather divinations. During stormy weather, the medicine-man may be heard in his tent engaged in loud incantations. After half a day spent in this manner, he appears, and predicts at what time the storm will begin to abate, the direction the wind will take, and the time that will elapse before its entire cessation. In short, he gives a complete meteoro-

logical and storm table; and, in the many instances in which these predictions were made in our presence, they invariably proved correct.

However, neither from undoubted medicine-men who have been converted to the Christian faith, nor from any others of whom we have heard, has any thing worth knowing in relation to what may be termed the mysteries of the ceremonies above indicated been ever elicited. Christian exconjurers have, we believe, been known to express an opinion that they possessed a power when pagans which they were unable to exercise after baptism. What this belief may be worth we do not know.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BLACKFEET—A PLAIN-INDIAN "TRADE."

WHOEVER has studied the geographical position of the posts of the Hudson's Bay Company cannot fail to have noticed the vast extent of country intervening between the forty-ninth parallel of latitude and the North Saskatchewan River, in which there exists no fort nor trading-station of the company. This is the country of the Blackfeet, that wild, restless, erring race, whose hand is against every man, and every man's hand against them. With the Rocky Mountains and the forty-ninth parallel as a portion of the circumference, a line drawn from the latter through the elbow of the South Saskatchewan River and the Bad Hill, thence trending northwest along the course of the Red-Deer River, nearly to the Rocky Mountain House, would inclose the British American territory of the Blackfeet nation. In the United States it extends along the course of the Missouri River to a point below the Sun River, thence diverging north of east to the elbow of the South Saskatchewan. A line drawn from the latter point to the Rocky Mountain House would measure six hundred miles in length, and yet lie wholly in the country of the Blackfeet. Along its northern border lies a fair and fertile land; but close by, scarcely half a day's journey to the

south, the arid, treeless, sandy plains begin to supplant the rich, verdure-clad hills and dales, and that immense central desert spreads out those ocean-like expanses which find their southern limit down by the waters of the Canadian River, full twelve hundred miles due south of the Saskatchewan.

Within the territory of the Blackfeet nation scarce a trace of settlement exists, and but few trading-posts stand to welcome the booty-laden warrior to their rude counters.* Along its entire border there prevails, during the months of summer and autumn, a state of perpetual warfare: on the north and east with the Plain Crees; on the south and west with the Kootanais and Flatheads; on the southeast and northwest with the Assiniboines of the plain and mountains; on the south there are ceaseless predatory excursions against the Americans on the Missouri. Ever since the tribes first became known to the white traders, there has existed this state of hostility among them. The red-man has always three great causes of war—to steal a horse, to take a scalp, or to get a wife. On the north, the Crees and Assiniboines continually force on hostilities, for the sake of stealing the Blackfeet horses, which are far better than their own; while, on the south, the Blackfeet make war upon the Crows and Flatheads for a similar reason. At war with every nation that touches the wide circle of their boundaries, these wild, dusky men sweep like a whirlwind over the arid deserts of the central

* Considerable change has taken place in the character of the Blackfeet country within the past six years, owing to the rapid settlement of the Northwest Territories, and the establishment of Mounted Police Stations at different points.

plateau. They speak a language distinct from that of all other native tribes; their feasts and ceremonies, too, are different from those of other nations. Not absolutely stationary residents of a domain, and wandering much by families and tribes, yet they are not nomads; a confederacy, there is not the semblance of a national government anywhere. In fact, they form the most curious anomaly of that race of men who are passing away beneath our eyes into the infinite solitude. The legend of their origin runs thus:

"Long years ago, when their great forefather crossed the Mountains of the Setting Sun, and settled along the sources of the Missouri and South Saskatchewan, it came to pass that a chief had three sons: Kenna, or The Blood; Peaginou, or The Wealth; and a third who was nameless. The first two were great hunters; they brought to their father's lodge rich store of moose and elk meat, and the buffalo fell beneath their unerring arrows; but the third, or nameless one, ever returned empty-handed from the chase, until his brothers mocked him for want of skill. One day the old chief said to this unsuccessful hunter: 'My son, you cannot kill the moose, your arrows shun the buffalo, the elk is too fleet for your footsteps, and your brothers mock you because you bring no meat into the lodge; but see! I will make you a mighty hunter.' And the old chief took from his lodge-fire a piece of burnt stick, and, wetting it, rubbed the feet of his son with the blackened charcoal, and named him Sat-sia-qua, or The Blackfeet; and evermore Sat-sia-qua was a mighty hunter, and

his arrows flew straight to the buffalo, and his feet moved swift in the chase." *

According to tradition, from these three sons descended the three tribes of Blood, Peaginou, and Blackfeet; but for many generations there have been two other tribes or parts of tribes recognized in the confederacy. These are the Gros-Ventres, or Atsinas, on the extreme southeast, a branch of the Arrapahoe nation who dwelt along the sources of the Platte; and the Sircies, on the north, a branch or offshoot of the Chippewyans of Lake Athabasca. The latter are a small but very mischievous band, which, last of all the tribes, joined the confederacy. How the former tribe became detached from the parent-stock has never been determined; but of the latter tradition tells how a tribe of Beavers, fighting over the wanton killing of a dog, concluded a peace only on condition of separation; and the friends of the chief whose arrow had killed the dog marched out into the night to seek their fortunes in the vast wilderness lying to the south. A hundred years later, a Beaver Indian, following the fortunes of a white trader, found himself in one of the forts of the Saskatchewan. Strange Indians were camped about the palisades, and among them were a few braves who, when they conversed together, spoke a language different from the other Blackfeet; in this the Beaver Indian recognized his own tongue. And to this day the Sircies speak the language of their original tribe—a guttural tongue which may be heard far down in Mexico and Nicaragua, among the wild Navajo and Apache horsemen of

* Major Butler, "Great Lone Land."

the Mexican plains—in addition to that of the adopted one. The Blackfeet tongue is rich, musical, and stately; that of the Sircies harsh, guttural, and difficult; and while the Sircies always speak the former in addition to their own tongue, the Blackfeet rarely acquire the language of the Sircies. Although the remaining tribes of the great Blackfeet nation live in close alliance and speak the same language, yet it is comparatively easy to distinguish them by differences of dialect and pronunciation, such as prevail in the various districts of our own country.

Of the territory occupied by the Blackfeet nation, the Sircies, numbering scarcely two hundred souls, inhabit the northern border; joining them on the south come the Blackfeet proper, numbering, according to the late annual counts of the Hudson's Bay officers at their posts, about four thousand. From their southern limit to the South Saskatchewan range the Bloods, numbering two thousand; and thence to the Missouri wander the Peagins, numbering three thousand. In March, 1870, the small-pox, carrying off large numbers of the latter tribe, swept northward through the remaining tribes, and reduced the nation by a fourth. Previous to the ravages of this terrible epidemic, the Blackfeet confederacy was believed to comprise from twelve to fourteen thousand people, all included.

But the Blackfeet, taken as a body, are still the most numerous and powerful of the nations that live wholly or partly in British North America. In person they have developed an unusual degree of beauty and symmetry. Though

of less stature than many other Indians, they are still tall and well made. Their faces are very intelligent, the nose aquiline, the eyes clear and brilliant, the cheek-bones less prominent, and the lips thinner than usual among other tribes. The dress of the men differs little from the ordinary costume of the Indian of the plains, except in being generally cleaner and in better preservation. The Bloods dress more neatly and are finer and bolder-looking men than the Blackfeet, who, in turn, surpass the Peagins in these respects. The Bloods are said to have among them many comparatively fair men, with grey eyes, and hair both finer and lighter-colored than usual in the case of pure Indians. This tribe is supposed to bear its savage name, not from any particular cruelty of disposition, but because, unlike the other tribes, its warriors do not steal horses, but only seek for the blood of their enemies, whom they generally overcome, for they are among the bravest of all the natives. The faces of both Blackfeet men and women are generally highly painted with vermilion, which seems to be the national color. The dress of the latter is very singular and striking, consisting of long gowns of buffalo-skins, dressed beautifully soft, and dyed with yellow ochre. This is confined at the waist by a broad belt of the same material, thickly studded over with round brass plates, the size of a silver half-dollar piece, brightly polished. The Blackfeet, however, in common with other Indians, are rapidly adopting blankets and capotes, and giving up the beautifully-painted robes of their forefathers. The ornamented robes that are now made are inferior in workmanship to those of the days gone by.

The mental characteristics of the Blackfeet resemble closely those of Indians everywhere. Similar circumstances give shape and force to thoughts and emotions in all. Intellectual vigor is manifested in shrewdness of observation, and strong powers of perception, imagination, and eloquence. They are quick of apprehension, cunning, noble-minded, and firm of character, yet cautious in manner, and with a certain expression of pride and reserve. They are strong and active, and naturally averse to an indolent habit. Their activity, however, is rather manifested in war and the chase than in useful labor. Pastoral, agricultural, and mechanical labor they despise, as forming a sort of degrading slavery. In this they are as proud as the citizens of the old republics whose business was war. Their labors are laid upon the women, who also are, upon occasion, the beasts of burden upon their marches; for the egotism of the red-man, like that of his white brother, makes him regard woman as his inferior, and a predestined servant to minister to his comfort and pleasure. The Blackfeet have, moreover, both a local attachment and a strong patriotic or national feeling, in which respect they differ favorably from all other tribes. In their public councils and debates they exhibit a genuine oratorical power, and a keenness and closeness of reasoning quite remarkable. Eloquence in public speaking is a gift which they earnestly cultivate, and the chiefs prepare themselves by previous reflection and arrangement of topics and methods of expression. Their scope of thought is as boundless as the land over which they roam, and their speech the echo of the beauty that

lies spread around them. Their expressions are as free and lofty as those of any civilized man, and they speak the voices of the things of earth and air amid which their wild life is cast. Their language being too limited to afford a wealth of diction, they make up in ideas, in the shape of metaphor furnished by all Nature around them, and read from the great book which day, night, and the desert, unfold to them.

As before stated, although the Blackfeet nation is really a confederacy of five tribes, yet there is no semblance of a national government anywhere. All political power is vested in the head-chief of each tribe, and is nearly absolute while he exercises it. He is the executor of the people's will, as determined in the councils of the elders. Some of them are men of considerable natural abilities; all must be brave and celebrated in battle. Sometimes they are hereditary leaders, but more frequently owe their elevation to prowess in war, or merits as orators and statesmen. Public opinion elevates them, and that, together with an uncompromising assertion of their rights, alone sustains them. To disobey the mandate of a chief is, at times, to court instant death at his hands. But, when a chief is once established in power, the tribe generally confide in his wisdom, and there is seldom any transgression of the laws promulgated by him. He has absolute control of all military expeditions; and, whithersoever the chief or leader of the soldiers is sent by him, the warriors follow. At the present time, the two most prominent chiefs of the Blackfeet nation are Sapoo-max-sika, or "The Great Crow's Claw," chief of the Blackfeet proper, and Oma-ke-pee-mulkee-yeu, or

"The Great Swan," chief of the Bloods. These men are widely diverse in character, the former being a man whose word, once given, may be relied upon for fulfillment; while the latter is represented as a man of colossal proportions and savage disposition, crafty, treacherous, and cruel.

As a race, the Blackfeet are livelier than other Indian tribes. The latter are generally quarrelsome when in liquor, while the former show their jollity by dancing, singing, and hugging one another with all sorts of antics. Though so fond of rum, the Blackfeet are not habitual drunkards. They get completely drunk once or twice a year, but at other times take nothing stronger than coffee, which the United States Government deals out to them as part of an annual subsidy. They consider—and not without some reason—that these periodical excesses are good for them, curing the biliousness caused by their mode of life.

A BLACKFEET GRAVE.

Their funeral and burial ceremonies indicate their belief in the immortality of the soul. These forms are of a similar type among all the tribes composing the nation. They place their dead, dressed in gaudiest apparel, within a tent, in a sit-

ting posture, or occasionally fold them in skins and lay them on high scaffolds out of the reach of wild beasts, under which the relatives weep and wail. Their arms and horses are buried with them, to be used in the long journey to the spirit-land, showing the possession of the idea of the dual nature of matter and spirit.

A somewhat singular custom obtains upon the death of a child. Immediately upon its decease, the whole village rush into the lodge and take possession of whatever portable property they can seize upon, until the grief-stricken parents are stripped of all their worldly possessions, not even excepting their clothing. The only method of evading the custom is to secrete the most valuable property beforehand, generally a matter difficult of accomplishment.

Although the Blackfeet nation is divided into detached tribes, yet the essential characteristics of the race may be found in all. Proud, courageous, independent, and dignified in bearing, they form the strongest possible contrast with the majority of the Northern tribes; and they have many natural virtues which might carry them far toward civilization, but for the wars into which they have been plunged by the rapacity of the whites. These wars have not only greatly diminished their numbers, but keep alive a feeling of implacable hatred of the whole white race, which no extraneous influence has as yet served to mitigate. "At this moment," wrote an American officer scarcely fifteen years since, "it is certain a man can go about through the Blackfeet country without molestation, except in the contingency of being mistaken at night

for an Indian." But fifteen years of injustice and wrong have changed the friend into an aggressive enemy. Injustice and wrong toward the Indian have almost always formed the rule with the Government and individuals, and the opposite the exception. Smarting under a sense of these wrongs, the Blackfeet have been made implacable enemies of their oppressors. Those who have paraded a "knowledge of Indian character" have, in scores of instances, purposely fanned the flames of indignation and desire for revenge, and incited the Indians to make war that their own craft might prosper in government employ. Knowledge of Indian character has too long been synonymous with knowledge of how to cheat the Indian; a species of cleverness which, even in the science of chicanery, does not require the exercise of the highest abilities. The red-man has already had too many dealings with persons of this class, and has now a very shrewd idea that those who possess this knowledge of his character have also managed to possess themselves of his property.

At war on every hand, anything like regular trade with the Blackfeet nation is carried on with much difficulty. Years ago a desultory exchange of peltries and merchandise was conducted through the Peagin tribe at Fort Benton and other posts on the Missouri; but constant imposition on the part of the white traders, and retaliation by the red-men, have now nearly estopped all commercial relations between the two parties. In recent years, a small post established by two Americans on the Belly River, sixty miles within British territory, on the Fort Benton and Edmonton House trail, for

the purpose of trading improved arms, ammunition, and spirits, to the Blackfeet, has attracted the greater share of their trade; the Blackfeet realizing the necessity of meeting their enemies with the improved implements of modern warfare. This establishment, controlled by a band of outlaws, obtaining its goods by smuggling across the boundary-line, and the open and flagrant violation of all law, human and divine, and only safe from plunder by the savages by reason of superior armament and the known reckless character of its servants, was fortunately broken up by the Dominion constabulary a short time since. It is a matter of regret, however, that the Blackfeet should have been thoroughly supplied with repeating-rifles previous to its demolition. The closing of this post leaves the Blackfeet nation but one other trading-post* in the immediate vicinity of their own territory, and diverts the trade from an American to a British channel.

The Rocky-Mountain House of the Hudson's Bay Company stands upon the high northern bank of the North Saskatchewan River, in the thick pine-forest which stretches away to the base of the foot-hills. The stream here runs in a deep, wooded valley, on the western extremity of which rise the towering peaks of the Rocky Mountains. The house itself is a heavy log structure, and presents many features to be found in no other post of the region. Built with especial reference to the Plain-Indian trade, every device known to

* The writer refers to the old established trading-posts of the Fur Trade. Since the formation of the Northwest Territories by the Dominion Government, military and trading-posts have been scattered throughout the Blackfeet country.

the trader has been put in force to secure the servants against the possibility of a surprise during a barter; for the wily Blackfeet seize every opportunity to overpower the garrison and help themselves, to the complete collapse of profit on the trade to the Hudson's Bay Company. Bars, bolts, locks, sliding-doors, and places to fire down upon the Indians, abound in every direction, and the apartments in which the Indians assemble to trade are cut off from all communication with the remaining rooms of the fort. In effect, the customers of this isolated mercantile establishment are handled very much after the manner of a hot coal, and surrounded, metaphorically speaking, with sheet-iron guards lest damage might result to the holder.

When the Blackfeet have accumulated a sufficient number of peltries to warrant a visit to the Rocky-Mountain House, two or three envoys, or forerunners, are chosen, and are sent in advance of the main body, by a week or more, to announce their approach and notify the officers in charge of the quantity of provisions, peltries, robes, horses, etc., which they will have to dispose of; and also to ascertain the whereabouts of their hereditary enemies, the Crees and Mountain Assiniboines. The envoys prepare for state visits of this nature by an assumption of their gaudiest apparel, and a more than usual intensity of paint: scarlet leggins and blankets; abundance of ribbons in the cap, if any be worn, or the headband trimmed with beads and porcupine-quills, while the bulk of the cap is made of the plumage of birds; again, a single feather from the wing of an eagle or white-bird, fastened in

the scalp-lock, or the hair plaited in a long cue behind, and two shorter ones hanging down on each side in front, each bound round with coils of bright brass wire; round the eyes a halo of bright vermilion, a streak down the nose, a patch on each cheek, and a circle round the mouth of the same color, constitute the effective head-gear of the advance-agents. The remainder of the costume is modified by climate and seasons. In the summer they are almost naked, seldom wearing more than the *azain*, or loin-cloth. In the colder months they wear clothing made of the skins of wild animals, dressed, or with fur on; soft moccasins of deerskin, brightly ornamented with pigments, beads, and stained quills of the porcupine; leather stockings or leggins of dressed deer-skin, ornamented generally by fringes of the same material, covering the moccasins and reaching nearly to the body, and suspended by a thong round the abdomen. With the females the leggins extend from the feet to the knees, below which they are fastened by a beaded and quilled garter. A shirt, made of soft buffalo-skin, and a necklace of bear's-claws and teeth, together with a fire-bag and tobacco-pipe—the inseparable companions of every Indian—complete the costume. The forerunner is anxious to make every article of his elaborate toilet tell with effect, as his mission is regarded as an important one, in which a failure to produce a favorable impression on the mind of the trader would be fraught with disastrous consequences to the prospective trade.

Upon arriving at the post, the envoys are received and handsomely entertained by the officer in charge, who

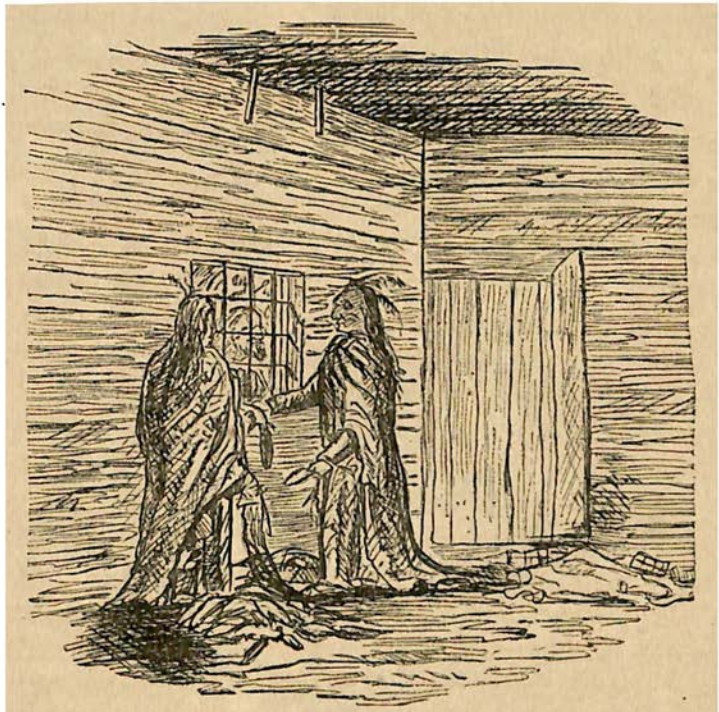
makes them presents according to their rank, and in proportion to the anticipated value of the trade. They are feasted, smoked, and, upon occasion, wined to a considerable extent. In turn, they report the number of peltries, horses, etc., to be traded by the band, and name the articles likely to be most in demand by their brethren. Such goods are at once placed where they may be easily accessible, and the quantity, if inadequate, is augmented by supplies procured at the nearest post, should there be sufficient time for that purpose. The forerunners are shown the stock of merchandise on hand, and the quality of the goods; the values of different articles are explained to them, and the fullest understanding upon all matters relative to the trade is arrived at. This completed, and a few days of lounging indulged in, the advance-agents depart to their tribe, and the little garrison of the Mountain House prepare for the coming struggle.

Within the fort a searching examination is made of the efficient working of all bolts, locks, gratings, etc., and of the closing of all means of communication between the Indian-room—a large apartment in which the Blackfeet assemble previous to being admitted into the trading-store—and the rest of the buildings; guns are newly cleaned, reloaded, and placed, together with abundant ammunition, by the numerous loop-holes in the lofts above the trading and Indian-rooms. From the shelves of the former are taken most of the blankets, colored cloths, guns, ammunition, ribbons, bright handkerchiefs, beads, etc., the staple commodities of the Indian trade, with a view of decreasing the excitement under which the

red-man always labors when brought into immediate juxtaposition with so much bravery—an excitement which renders him oblivious to furnishing an equivalent in exchange, and tends to foster his habits of forcible seizure. Preparations are also made within the stockade for the reception of the ponies to be purchased, and their safe-keeping afterward, for the Blackfeet's fine sense of humor frequently leads him to ride away an animal he has just sold, by way of practical joke upon the owner.

All things being made secure, there remains for the use of the Blackfeet the narrow passage-way leading from the outer gate of the stout log stockade to the Indian-room—a passage tightly walled up with smooth logs, in which no interstices or footholds occur, in order to prevent all entrance into the yard of the inclosure,—the Indian-room itself, and the small hall-way leading from it to the trading-store. This latter is closed by two heavy doors, the space between being barely sufficient to accommodate two persons standing with their peltries. In trading but two Indians are admitted into the trading-store at one time, after the following fashion: The passage-door leading into the Indian-room is opened, and two braves admitted therein; then it is closed, and the other door leading into the trading-store opened. When the two warriors have finished trading, their return to the Indian-room is effected by a similar process, one door always being kept shut. Both these doors are made to slide into their places, and are manipulated from an apartment occupied by the traders; so that the supply of customers is regulated as

desired. The trading-store is divided by means of a stout partition extending from floor to ceiling into two parts, one for the goods and traders, the other for the Indians. In the centre of this partition an aperture of little more than a yard



THE TRADING STORE.

square is cut, divided by a grating into squares sufficiently large to admit the passage of an arm, a blanket, or a robe, but inadequate to the admission of the red-man in person. This partition is necessitated by the fact of the Blackfeet's forget-

fulness of the existence of counters, and the exasperating pertinacity with which he insists upon close and personal examination of the goods. It sometimes happens, too, that he expresses his dissatisfaction at the price of a much-coveted article by desultory firing at the person of the trader, who, in the absence of such partition, has no means of escape or concealment. It is on account of a somewhat frequent repetition of this occurrence that the two loop-holes in the ceiling immediately above the grating are perhaps the most closely guarded of any during the progress of a trade. From time to time, as the shelves are depleted of their gaudy lading, advantage is taken of the absence of all Indians from the room to have new supplies brought in ; care being taken to preserve an equilibrium, the loss of which would lead to a corresponding depression or excitement on the part of the braves. The furs and provisions traded are at once transferred to another apartment out of sight.

On the day appointed for the trade a moving cloud approaching over the prairie soon takes on a certain degree of individuality, and the picturesque throng come in mounted upon their gayly-caparisoned ponies, dashing over the ground at full speed, sometimes singly, most often in knots of two or three, or even larger groups. When the Blackfeet pay a visit to the Mountain House they generally come in large numbers, prepared to fight with either Crees or Assiniboines. The braves generally ride free, while the squaws and children bring up the rear with the ponies and dogs drawing the loaded *travailles*. A *travaille* is an Indian contrivance consisting of

two poles fastened together at an acute angle, with crossbars between. The point of the angle rests upon the back of the dog or horse, the diverging ends of the poles drag along the ground, and the baggage is tied on to the crossbars. The Indians use these contrivances instead of carts. It frequently occurs that, in addition to the packs of dogs and horses, the women are also heavily laden.

The Blackfeet, having successfully forded the river with their peltries, by piling them upon the backs of ponies which they force to swim the stream, form a camp at some distance from the fort, pitching their *tepees* and spreading the wet robes out to dry. A *tepee*, or lodge, is generally composed of from ten to twelve buffalo-hides, from which the hair has been removed, and the skin nicely tanned and smoked. The usual number of Indians to a *tepee* is seven, of which at least two are warriors or able-bodied fighting-men. The camp being completed, the ponies for barter are selected, and the furs and provisions made ready for transportation to the fort, and easily accessible during the trade. The ponies of the Blackfeet are generally of a superior breed to those found among other Northern tribes, and command higher prices. The braves are very fond of their horses, and very careful of them, differing in this respect from the Crees and Assiniboines, who are rough and unmerciful masters. They have a custom of marking their horses with certain hieroglyphics, painting them over with curious devices, and scenting them with aromatic herbs.

Everything being made ready in the Blackfeet camp—

peltries collected in small bundles, provisions packed, robes and dressed skins dried and easily accessible, the best garments and most vivid paint donned by the braves—whatever is to be traded is now laid upon the backs of ponies and squaws, and the entire camp approach the fort in long cavalcade. Within a short distance of the stockade the procession halts, and the officer in charge goes out to meet them. A small circle is formed by the chiefs and head-men, the trader enters it, and the palaver begins. Many speeches are made; each brave, first embalming himself in a few words of feeling eulogy, assures the officer of his inordinate affection for the white race in general and his person in particular, and avows his intention of conducting the ensuing trade in a strictly honorable and orderly manner—the whole affair terminating by the principal chief illustrating his love for his white brother and his own "big heart" by loading a pony with an heterogeneous collection of robes, leather, and provisions, and handing horse and all he carries over to the officer. This is the Indian manner of beginning a trade; and, after such a present, no sane man can possibly entertain a doubt upon the big-heartedness of the donor. The custom has, however, one drawback—the trader is expected to return a present of twice the value. Unlike the Spaniard, when the red-man extends one the key of his house, he expects the offer to be taken literally, at the same time grimly smiling over the certain retribution which awaits the receiver. In fact, it is one of the inconveniences of having Indian friends that, if one expresses admiration of anything they possess, it is almost invariably

handled over, and the unfortunate recipient of a penny is in for a pound. In this case it is certain that, if the trader purchases a hundred horses during the trade which ensues, not one of the whole band will cost so dearly as that which demonstrates the friendship and large-heartedness of the chief. For, immediately upon the knowledge of its receipt at the fort, the gate is again swung open, and there is sent out to the chief, in return, a gift of blankets, strouds, ammunition, and finery, under the combined weight of which he staggers off, looking like a vermilion Atlas. Such tangible proof of the corresponding size of the trader's heart being received, the chief addresses the assembled braves, exhorting them to conduct themselves in an orderly and peaceable manner, and not prove him the possessor of a forked tongue by rude behavior. The braves, standing ready with their peltries, and eager to begin the trade, readily promise to observe his commands, and move up toward the gate of the stockade.

The trader having returned to the post, all preparations for the trade are completed, communication cut off, men all stationed at their posts ready for anything that may turn up. Then the outer gate is thrown open, and the eager crowd rushes into the Indian-room. In a moment the door leading into the little hall-way connecting that apartment with the trading-store slides back, and two Indians with their peltries enter. Then the door slides into place again, and the other one opens, admitting the braves into the store. They look through the grating, select the articles they want, and pay for them in installments. An Indian never asks at once for

everything he wants, and then pays for it in one payment, but purchases one thing at a time, receives his change, then turns his attention to another. In this way he seems to get more for his money; and the linked sweetness of shopping is longer drawn out. The trade is rapidly pushed, and the braves are at once returned by the double-barred process to the Indian-room, and a fresh batch admitted, when the doors are again locked.

The reappearance of each installment of fortunate braves, with the much-prized articles of ornament and use, continually augments the growing excitement of the waiting throng in the Indian-room. Each one is eagerly questioned as to what he saw, whether there was any of this or that article, and whether the supply would be likely to be exhausted before the questioner's turn arrived. Each succeeding statement that there were on the shelves but a few guns, blankets, a little tea, sugar, etc., intensifies the anxiety, and the crush to get in increases in proportion, under the belief that everything will be gone. The announcement by the trader, through a loop-hole, that there will be enough for all, scarcely allays the confusion in any measure, the universal desire and rush to obtain the first choice still remaining. Thus the trade progresses until all the furs and provisions have changed hands, and there is nothing more to be traded. Sometimes, however, the trade does not proceed so smoothly. It frequently happens that the Blackfeet repair to the fort with but a small collection of robes and leather, under which circumstances, being of a frugal mind, they object to seeing their stock in trade go for a

little tea and sugar. These objections generally assume the shape of bullets and knife-hacking, of which the walls of the Indian-room bear plentiful evidence. Then the trading-store is promptly closed, only to be re-opened when the sudden ebullition of anger has passed away.

Upon the completion of the exchange of peltries and goods begins the horse-trading; and the method of carrying it on depends much upon the humor which the Blackfeet exhibit. If they appear well satisfied with the trade of goods, then the horse-trading takes place immediately outside the stockade—the animals being led within as fast as purchased, and the Indians shown singly into the trading-store to be paid. If an aggressive spirit obtains, however, a single brave, with his pony or ponies, is admitted at a time within the yard of the stockade, the trade effected, and the owner paid and passed without the gate before the admission of a second. Perhaps a more than usual care is exercised during the progress of this trade, from the fact that the Blackfeet generally all gather about the stockade at that time, and, the majority being already supplied with goods, they fail to recognize the necessity of longer preserving peaceful relations with the traders.

A peculiarity of these trades lies in the fact that money values are unknown, everything being reckoned by skins, as is the case throughout a great portion of the company's territory. The skin is a very old term in the fur-trade, and is based upon the standard of the beaver-skin, or, as it is called, the made beaver. For example: a beaver, or skin, is reck-

oned equivalent to one mink-skin; one marten is equal to two skins, one buffalo-robe to six skins, a silver fox to twenty skins, and so on throughout the scale of fur. In a like manner all articles of merchandise have their value in skins. Thus a brave brings a pony, which is valued at fifty skins, and these fifty skins will be divided as follows: a kettle, five skins; a blanket, ten skins; a capote, ten skins; ammunition, ten skins; tobacco, fifteen skins. The brave hands over the pony, and receives in payment a capote, a blanket, a kettle, ammunition, and tobacco. The original skin, the beaver, now seldom makes its appearance at the Mountain House, those animals having been nearly exterminated in that part of the territory; but, notwithstanding the fact of the marked deterioration in the price of the beaver-skin since it was originally adopted as the standard of value in the fur-trade, owing to the extensive use of silk in the manufacture of hats, it still nominally retains the fictitious value first placed upon it.

A somewhat amusing illustration of the universal passion for dress, which forms a distinguishing characteristic of the Blackfeet, equally with other Indians, occurs in these trades. The fashionable costume of the red-man is not generally regulated by the variable moods of the mercurial Parisian; indeed, it has undergone but little change since the memory of men. Certain interesting specimens of the race are said to have been seen attired in even less than the vaunted Mexican costume—a shirt-collar and pair of spurs. We ourselves remember to have seen one chastely appareled in a stove-pipe

hat. But it frequently occurs, during the trades, that some doughty chieftain elects to appear in more than regal magnificence before his tribe; and for his benefit, and those of similar tastes, the company annually import certain ancient costumes prevalent in England some half-century since. The tall, stove-pipe hat, with round narrow brim; the snuff-brown or bright-blue coat, with high collar, climbing up over the neck, the sleeves tightly fitting, the waist narrow—this is the Blackfeet's ideal of perfection in dress, and the brave who can array himself in this antique garb struts out from the fort the envy and admiration of all beholders. Often the high hat is ornamented with a decayed ostrich-plume, drooping like the shadow of a great sorrow, which has figured in the turban of some dowager of the British Isles long years since. While the presence of trousers is considered by no means essential to the perfect finish of the costume, the addition of a narrow band of gold lace about the coat is regarded as imparting an air of tone to the general effect not to be obtained in any other way. For such a costume the Blackfeet brave will barter his deer-skin shirt, beaded, quilled, and ornamented with the raven locks of his enemies; his head-band of beautiful feathers and shells; and the soft-tanned and flowing robe of buffalo-skin—a dress which adds a kingly dignity to his athletic form for one which *Pantaloon* would scorn to wear. Fortunately, the new dress does not long survive. Little by little it is found unsuited to the wild life which its owner leads, and, although never losing the originally high estimate placed upon it, is discarded at length by reason of the many

inconveniences arising from running buffalo in a plug-hat and fighting in a swallow-tail coat against the Crees.

In the old days of the fur trade, when spirits were used as a medium of exchange, the most frightful scenes were wont to occur. First suggested as a stimulant to the manufacture of provisions, the amount given was limited to a small quantity to each Indian at the termination of a trade. Even then no drinking was permitted within a mile of the forts. Unfortunately for the moderate use of this incentive to pemmican-making, on the part of the redman, his acute intellect instantly conceived the idea of utilizing this particular provision as a perpetual legal tender for liquor. So he withheld his pemmican until the food supply ran short among the forts of the corporation, and forced a compliance with his own terms. For all the other wants of his savage life he had furs and robes to trade. The scenes that occurred in the Indian rooms of the forts, during the progress of a liquor and pemmican trade, were not calculated to impress one favorably with the moral status of either his white or red brother. The spirit used was generally rum, which, although freely diluted with water, soon reduced the assemblage to a state of wild hilarity, quickly followed by stupidity and sleep. The strength of the fire-water dealt out was varied according to the capacity or hard-headedness of the different tribes. The liquor for the Crees, as living in the neighborhood of the forts and supposed to be capable of standing more, was composed of three parts of water to one of spirit; that of the Blackfeet, a distant tribe, who had access to liquor infrequently, seven

of water to one of spirit. So great, however, is the power which alcohol, in any form, exercises over the red-man that the Blackfeet, even upon their well-diluted liquor, were wont to become hopelessly intoxicated.

A liquor trade generally began with a present of fire-water all round. Then business went on apace. After an Indian had taken his first drink, it was a matter of little difficulty to obtain all he had in exchange for spirits. Horses, robes, tents, provisions—all would be proffered for one more dram of the beloved poison. As the trade advanced it degenerated into a complete orgy. Nothing could exceed the excitement inside the room, except it was the excitement outside—for only a limited number of the thirsty crowd could obtain entrance at a time. There the anxious braves could only learn by hear-say what was going on within. Now and then a brave, with an amount of self-abnegation worthy of a better cause, would issue from the fort, with his cheeks distended and his mouth full of rum, and going along the ranks of his friends he would squirt a little of the liquor into the open mouths of his less fortunate brethren. There were times, however, when matters did not go on so peaceably. Knives were wont to flash and shots to be fired, and the walls of the Indian-rooms at many of the forts show frequent traces of bullet-marks and knife hacking, done in the wild fury of the intoxicated savage. Some seventeen years ago this baneful distribution was stopped by the company in the Plain districts, but the free-traders still continue to employ liquor as a means of acquiring the furs belonging to the Indians. Great as was the quantity of pemmi-

can obtained from the Indians during these trades—more than thirty thousand bags being stored in the company's forts at one time—it is still small as compared with the amount produced in a favorable year by the semi-annual buffalo-hunts of the nomadic half-breeds.

CHAPTER X.

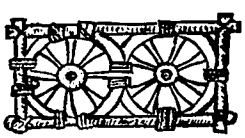
WINTER TRAVEL.

AUTUMN in the Fur Land merges by almost imperceptible degrees into winter. Nature yields reluctantly to the cold embraces of the Frost King. The yellow leaves cling tenaciously to the tree-tops; the prairie grasses are still green when the snow comes. Early in November a thin covering of fleecy flakes veils the landscape; but the Southern sun is yet warm, and restores the autumal tints to the face of Nature. A few days later on, the contest begins anew: winter triumphs for a day, only to be again vanquished by autumn. At length the battle-ground is occupied equally by the contending forces. The traveled roads especially are claimed by each; and, plowed and furrowed by their fierce forays, afford neither the splendid sleighing of the later winter nor the dry wheeling of the summer. This has the effect of bringing out in full force the various methods of locomotion peculiar to the Fur Land. It is refreshing to view from a window fronting a well-traveled highway the queer vehicles as they pass; and if the reader chooses to occupy one-half of our lookout, we can study the shifting panorama at leisure.

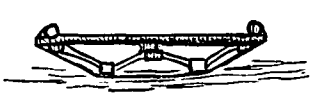
The picture before us is framed by the window-sash, and has a dreary perspective of prairie, covered equally with snow

and mud-bordered pools of water. The first object that comes into the foreground is the Red River cart. This vehicle figures prominently in all these northern scenes. It is a national institution, so to speak, and boasts of great solidity. No springs of any kind disfigure it, or alarm the passenger with their giddy and uncertain motion. He knows just when the wheels strike the ground, and understands exactly where he is. These carts are all of uniform shape, and are constructed entirely of wood, the axles and rims to the wheels forming no exception to the rule. Although this at first sight might appear to be a disadvantage, as denoting a want of strength, yet it is really the reverse, as in the country traversed by these vehicles, wood is always to be had in sufficient quantities to mend any breakage which may occur. The only tools necessary, not only to mend but to construct a cart, are an axe, a saw, and an auger; with these the half-breed is independent so far as the integrity of his vehicle is concerned. Indeed, the cart may be described as a light box-frame poised upon an axle connecting two strong wooden wheels. These are of more than the usual diameter, and are enormously dished. As seats in vehicles are a superfluous luxury, only demanded by the effete civilization of the East, the half-breed eschews them altogether. The passenger sits on the bottom plank, usually the hardest one about the cart; and as the bed of the vehicle is lower than the shafts, his heels are somewhat higher than his hips, which gives him the greater benefit of the inequalities in the road over which he may pass. When, as is often the case, the cover is low and

narrow, so as to make necessary a forward inclination of the head toward the feet, it is easy to imagine the comfort of the posture as a whole. Frequently the passenger, after becoming weary of this position, and alternating it with an attempt to keep his balance on a carpet-bag or other bundle, takes his place with the driver on the shaft. He may sit opposite Antoine, back to back, or immediately behind him; the first-named position being the most satisfactory to the olfactories, the last-named illustrating the brotherhood of races without any appreciable loss of space. With this vehicle, however, the native is independent of the rest of the world, and indifferent to the length of his journey. He straps a raw-hide over it at night and makes of it a tent; he straps a raw-hide under it and makes of it a boat in which he crosses any stream he may meet. There are no stones to injure its wheels, and the prairie sod bears up the weight of the broad wooden felloes where an iron tire would break through. Huge trains of these vehicles are used in freighting over the northern plains; and they furnish the chief means of land transportation in the country.



CART-WHEEL SCOW.



The single cart kept by each half-breed instead of a buggy, and devoted to the conveyance of his wife and family, is, however, much more elaborately gotten-up than those destined for the commoner uses of freighting. The wheels and shafts are shaved down to more delicate proportions; the

body is decorated with certain mystical emblems in red and yellow ochre, supposed to represent flowers; while over it is stretched a covering of oil-cloth or dressed skins to protect the fair traveler from the inclement weather. It is drawn, too, by the best pony in the half-breed's herd, and becomes as legitimate a subject of rivalry as the equipage of her more highly civilized sister. Like the freight cart, its wheels are always guiltless of grease. The creaking that results the natives are very proud of, having no wish, as they say, to steal upon people unawares, like a thief in the night. A perfectly new cart is seldom seen; each being in a greater or less condition of fracture and dislocation, and splintered and bandaged with raw-hide thongs.

Every cart is drawn by a single pony or ox; the latter, which is most affected for freighting purposes, will draw a load of nine hundred pounds at the rate of twenty-five miles per day. The steed is fastened between the shafts by means of a rude harness, generally made of dressed ox-hide. We have seen this same harness, however, made in a much more novel fashion. In buffalo-hunting, when the harness gives out, it is the habit of the half-breed, always fertile of resource, to manufacture a new one made all in one piece. Killing a buffalo bull, he skillfully marks out his harness on the hide of the fallen animal, then strips it off with his knife. A few hours' exposure in the sun dries it, a string or two supply the place of the necessary buckles, and it immediately does duty on the back of pony or ox. The long lines called shaganappi, that are used for so many purposes

in the country, are all made in a similar fashion. They are carved out from the hind-quarters of a bull, by forming a series of spirally-enlarging circular cuts, passing the knife under them, and lifting off the hide exactly like the skin of a well peeled apple or orange. The ends are then attached to two stakes, between which the strips being tightly stretched, soon become a straight and perfect line.

In traveling with carts—the common method of summer locomotion on the northern plains—generally as many ponies run loose alongside as are worked in harness. These loose horses, one might fancy, would be prone to gallop away when they find themselves at liberty to do so. Nothing seems further from their thoughts; they trot along beside their harnessed companions as if they knew all about it. When the shaft animal tires, to change horses is the work of but a moment. Out comes one horse; the other is standing close by and never stirs while the hot harness is put on him; in he goes into the rough shafts, and, with the crack of the driver's whip across his flanks, starts away with the rest. The fact that the pony may never have been in harness before makes no sort of difference to the driver. At first the animal refuses to move an inch; then comes loud and prolonged thwacking from half-breeds and Indians. Whips, raw-hide lines and sticks are freely used, when, like an arrow from a bow, away goes the pony; suddenly he makes a dead stop, gives two or three plunges high in the air, and falls down flat upon the ground. Again comes the threshing, and again up starts the pony and off like a rocket. Ox-hide harness is

tough; a broken cart is easily mended; and for all horses the native has this simple method of persuasion.

In fine contrast to this method of locomotion appears the native horseman just passing. Mounted on a little wiry ash-colored pony, he rides with that free, swinging motion peculiar to the practiced equestrian. And he is, perhaps, one of the finest horsemen in the world. His long dark-blue capote, and jaunty fur cap with pendent tassel, impart something of a military air to his appearance. He sits squarely upon a small pad of deer-skin, and rides with a long stirrup. Every motion of the horse, guided more by the pressure of the knee than the bridle-rein, is anticipated and met intuitively by the rider. There is no half-way gait with this impulsive horseman; he goes either at a walk or a mad gallop, and seldom exchanges this method of locomotion save for the canoe, the snowshoe, or the dog-sledge. Common pedestrianism is to him a lost art. The fact that he could walk to his next neighbor's door never seems to occur to him.

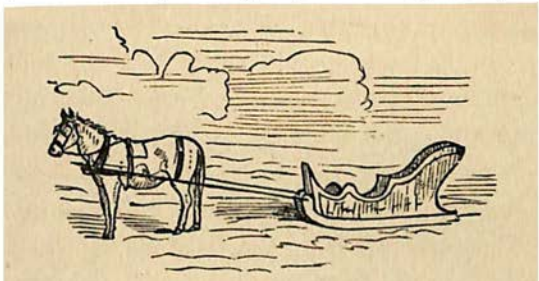
His little lithe, sinewy ponies are faithful beyond description, yet a fine-looking one is seldom seen. They stand about the dooryards with a discouraged, heart-broken air, and will take considerable pounding without much exhibition of life. Yet they endure privations and hardships better than their more delicately-nurtured brethren. True, if you ride them about the settlements, you are at first nearly pitched over every gate and fence you come to. When your pony catches sight of one of these he makes for it, and sud-

denly stands stock still, as a hint to you to dismount and tie him up—an illustration of the gossiping habits of his late owner. But out on the plains the daily distance compassed by these ponies without breaking down altogether under it seems scarcely credible; still less does it appear possible upon the food which they have to eat. Neither hay nor oats is given them—nothing but the prairie grasses, often dry as tinder, and eaten only during the frosty hours of the night. From forty to fifty miles a day, stopping only for one hour at midday, and going on again until late at night, is but average travel.

Of course the stranger journeys on in constant fear lest the game little limbs will grow weary and give out; but no, not a bit of it. An Indian pony does not die of hard travel. His shaggy coat roughens, and his flanks grow a little thinner, but still he goes on as pluckily as ever. If very tired he sometimes lags behind until his companions have disappeared behind some distant ridge in the prairie; then he begins to look anxiously around, whinnying and trying to get along after his comrades, and suddenly breaks into a wild dash down the trail until he regains his fellows—far-away specks in the great waste before him. When the night camp is reached the little animal is stripped, the thong of soft buffalo-skin untied from his neck and twisted well about his forelegs as a hopple, and he jumps away into the darkness to find his night's provender. He feeds and lodges himself and carries his master; all he gets in return is a water-hole cut in the ice for him in winter, and not always even that.

Trotting briskly into the foreground comes a diminutive pony in harness. A moment after appears the long pair of shafts to which he is attached, and, just when you have given over all hope of ever seeing their end, comes the vehicle of which all this is the propelling power. It does not come straight into the scene, like any other well-conducted vehicle, but zigzags into it, winding from one side of the road to the other, as if it had a drop too much. It acts as a sort of peripatetic pendulum, of which the diminutive pony is the pivot; even the hinder parts of that animal partaking of the vibrating motion of the vehicle, so that he seems certain only as to where his forelegs are going. This conveyance looks like a ship set on runners. It is very low amidships but very lofty as to poop and forecastle; it is broad in beam, and, the runners being not more than six inches high, there is always a pleasing uncertainty as to when it will capsize. It inevitably must, sooner or later, but just when is the conundrum. There are two seats, one low down amidships, the other high up in the stern of the craft. The driver sits forward, yells constantly at his pony and pushes on the lines to increase its speed; the passengers sit aft, with anticipation written on their countenances, and the sensation of being whirled along without any visible motive power—the horse being so far distant as seemingly to bear no relation to the vehicle. It is the cariole, native to the country, and the best equipage for general love-making we know of. Darby and Joan take a seat in the stern of the craft; the driver sits in the bow and looks at his horse alone, heaping on it plentiful profanity

discreetly veiled in the heathen tongues. The back seat, following the shape of the sledge, gravitates toward the centre; so do Darby and Joan, until they really seem to



A CARIOLE.

assimilate, so to speak. In fact, they are in a manner obliged to hold fast to each other, as the sledge overturns at the slightest provocation. It is a pleasant spectacle to see the well-freighted carioles, gay with gaudily-lined robes and wraps, careering along the highway; but it is still more pleasant to sit on that back seat and slowly gravitate toward Clarise or Angelique.

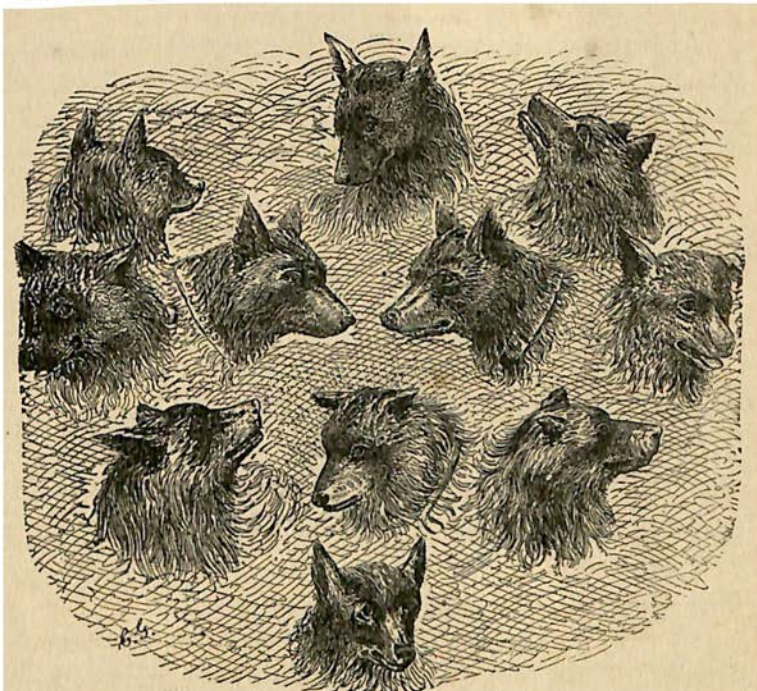
There comes midway into our picture the figure of a man moving over the surface of the snow with a swinging movement, like that of a fen-skater. Evidently he has something attached to his feet—something that clings to the toes, yet drops from the heels, and trails upon the snow as he raises a foot. Ah, he is a snowshoe runner!

To walk well on deep snow, to follow the dogs, to run down the moose, there is nothing like snowshoes. These are composed of a light wooden frame, about four feet in length,

tapering from a width of about fifteen inches at the centre to points at either end, the toes being turned up so as to prevent tripping. Over this frame a netting of deer-skin sinews or threads is stretched for the foot of the runner to rest upon. The object of this appliance is by a thin network to distribute the weight of the wearer over so large a surface of snow as will prevent him from sinking. The credit of the invention is due to the Indians, and, like that of the canoe and other Indian instruments, it is so perfectly suited to the object in view as not to be susceptible of improvement by the whites. On snowshoes an Indian or half-breed will travel thirty, forty, and sometimes even fifty miles in twenty-four hours. It is the common and indeed the only available mode of foot-travel away from the public highways in winter.

But here comes the winter vehicle of the Fur Land! The traveler who lingers long at any season of the year about a Hudson Bay Company's fort will be struck with the unusual number of dogs lying about the square court during the day, or howling and fighting underneath his windows at night. To leave his door open at any time is only to invite an invasion of the wolfish brutes, who come crowding up, and seem inclined to take possession of the apartment. During the summer season they do nothing for man, but pass their time in war, love, robbery, and music, if their mournful howls can be dignified by that name. And yet, neglected as are these noisy, dirty animals in their months of idleness, unfed, kept in bare life by plunder, the mark for every passer's stick or stone, they are highly prized by their owners, and a team of

fine, good, well-trained dogs will bring a handsome price when the winter season approaches. Then two well-broken dogs become as valuable as a horse; then it is the dogs that haul the sledges and that perform, in fact, nearly all the work of the country.



HUDSON'S BAY DOGS.

These animals are mostly of the ordinary Indian kind, large, long-legged, and wolfish, with sharp muzzles, pricked ears, and thick, straight, wiry hair. White is one of the most

usual colors, but brown, blue-grey, red, yellow, and white marked with spots of black, or of the other various hues, are also common. Some of them are black with white paws, others are covered with long rough hair, like Russian setters. There are others of a light bluish-grey, with dark, almost black spots spread over the whole body. Almost all of them have black noses, but with some of the lighter-colored ones this part is red, brown, or pink, which has a very ugly effect. Most of them are very wolfish in appearance, many being half or partly, or all but entirely, wolves in blood. One frequently sees dark-grey dogs which are said to be almost pure wolves. Seen upon the prairie, it is almost impossible to distinguish them from the ordinary wolf of the middle-sized variety; and their tempers are spoken of as a match for their looks. Indeed it often happens that the drivers of such dogs are obliged, before harnessing or unharnessing them, to stun them momentarily by a blow on the nose, on account of their savage natures. Many of the others, moreover, are nearly as bad, and need a touch of the same rough treatment. In some instances the worse animals are emasculated, with a view of improving their tempers without rendering them unfit for work.

It sometimes happens, however, that among this howling pack of mongrels there may be picked out a genuine train of dogs. There is no mistake about them in size or form, from foregoer to hindmost hauler. They are of pure Esquimaux breed, the bush-tailed, fox-headed, long-furred, clean-legged animals, whose ears, sharp-pointed and erect, spring from a

head embedded in thick tufts of wooly hair. Or there may be a cross of Esquimaux and Athabascan, with hair so long that the eyes are scarcely visible. These animals have come from the far-northern districts, and have brought a round sum to their owners. They are of much more equable temper than their wolfish brethren, and frequently have a keen appreciation of kindness. To haul is as natural to them as to point is natural to a pointer. Longer than any other dogs will their clean feet hold tough over the rough ice. But it is with dog-driving as with everything else; there are dogs and dogs, and the difference between their mental and physical characteristics are as great as between those of average men.

The vehicles to which dogs are harnessed in the Fur Land are of three kinds—the passenger-sledge, or dog-cariole, the freight-sledge, and the travaille. A cariole consists of a very thin board, usually not over half an inch thick, fifteen to twenty inches wide, and about ten feet long, turned up at one end in the form of a half circle, like the bend of an Ojibway canoe. To this board a light frame-work, resembling a coffin or a slipper-bath, is attached, about eighteen inches from the rear end. This frame-work is then covered over with buffalo-skin parchment, and painted and decorated according to taste. When traveling, it is lined with buffalo-robes and blankets, in the midst of which the passenger sits, or rather reclines; the vehicle being prevented from capsizing by the driver, who runs behind on snowshoes, holding on to a line attached to the back part of the cariole. The projecting end or floor behind the passenger's seat is utilized as a sort of boot

upon which to tie baggage, or as a platform upon which the driver may stand to gain a temporary respite when tired of running.

The freight-sledge is of more simple construction. It is made of two thin oak or birch-wood boards lashed together with deer-skin thongs, . Turned up in front, like a Norwegian snowshoe—scarcely a quarter of a circle—it is from nine to twelve feet in length, and sixteen inches broad. It runs

A FREIGHT-SLEDGE.

over hard snow or ice with great ease. Along its outer edges a leather lashing is run, through the loops of which a long leather line is passed to tie down tightly to its surface whatever may be placed upon it. From the front, close to the turned-up portion, in both baggage-sledge and cariole, the traces for draught are attached.

Dogs in the Fur Land are harnessed in a number of ways. The Esquimaux run their dogs abreast. On the coast of Hudson's Bay they are harnessed by many separate lines into a kind of band or pack ; while in Manitoba and the Saskatchewan they are driven tandem. Four dogs to each sledge form a complete train, though three and even two are used, and are harnessed to the cariole by means of two long traces. Between these traces the dogs stand one after the other, with a space intervening between them of perhaps a

foot. A round collar, passing over the head and ears and fitting closely to the shoulder, buckles on each side to the traces, which are supported by a back-band of leather. This back-band is generally covered with tiny bells, the collar being hung with those of larger size, and decorated with party-colored ribbons or fox-tails. In no single article of property, perhaps, is greater pride taken than in a train of dogs turned out in good style; and the undue amount of beads, bells, and ribbons, frequently employed to bedizen the poor brutes, produces the most comical effect when placed upon some terror-stricken dog, who, when first put into harness, usually looks the picture of fear, resembling a chief mourner clad in the garb of *Pantaloon*. The ludicrous effect is intensified when the victim happens to be young in years, and still retains the peculiar expression of puppyhood.

The rate of speed usually attained in sledge-travel is about forty miles per day of ten hours, although this rate is often nearly doubled. Four miles an hour is a common dog-trot when the animals are well loaded; but this can be greatly exceeded when hauling a cariole containing a single passenger upon smooth snow-crust or a beaten track. Very frequently extraordinary distances are compassed by a well-broken train of dogs. An instance is recorded where a young Scotch half-breed, driving the mail-sledge between Fort Garry and Pembina, was desirous of attending the wedding of his sister, which was to occur at seven o'clock of the morning following the evening of his regular departure for the latter place. To do this he would

have to make the journey in a single night. Leaving Fort Garry at five o'clock in the evening, he reported again with his return mail at a quarter to seven o'clock the following morning, having compassed a distance of one hundred and thirty-five miles in a single night with the same train of dogs. This remarkable speed is capable of ample verification. Sixty to eighty miles per day is not infrequently made in the way of passenger travel. Mr. McFarlane, a company's officer, made the journey down from Mackenzie River, a distance of twenty-one hundred miles, in forty-six traveling days, using the same dogs the entire way. An average train of four dogs will trot briskly along with three hundred pounds' weight without difficulty. Trains loaded to travel short distances with a barrel of liquor and two sacks of flour, or about six hundred and eighty pounds avoirdupois, are not an uncommon sight. This weight is exceptional, however, and only to be hauled when the roads are perfect.

When light showers of snow fall in minute particles, as if it were frozen dew, from a sky without a cloud, and the sun shining brightly, the winter traveler in the Fur Land knows just what degree of cold he may expect. He knows that masses of ice, the size of a man's fist, will form on his beard and mustache, from the moisture of his breath freezing as it passes through the hair; that his eye-lashes will have to be kept in rapid motion to prevent them from becoming permanently closed; that his hands can scarcely be exposed for a moment; that his bare fingers laid upon a gun-barrel will stick to it as if glued, from the instantaneous freezing of

their moisture; that the snow will melt only close to the fire, which forms a trench for itself, in which it sinks slowly to the level of the ground; that the snow, light and powdery, will not melt beneath the warmth of his foot, and his moccasins will be as dry on the journey as if he had walked through sawdust; that a crust of ice will form over the tea in his tin-cup, as he sits within a yard of the roaring fire; that he will have a ravenous appetite for fat, and can swallow great lumps of hard grease—unmoulded tallow candles—without bread or anything to modify it. So he dresses accordingly—that is, the white traveler.

He first puts on three or four flannel shirts, one of duffel, and over all a leather one, beaded and fringed to suit the taste; his hands are encased in mittaines, or large gloves of moose-skin, made without fingers, and extending well up toward the elbows; loose enough to be easily doffed on occasion, and carried slung by a band about the neck to prevent being lost; his feet are swathed in duffel, and covered with enormous moccasins; his legs are encased in thick duffel leggins, until they resemble a severe case of elephantiasis; his ears and neck are protected by a thick curtain of fur; and yet, with it all, he is hardly able to keep warm with the most active exercise.

With his Indian or half-breed companion it is different. Inured to the climate and accustomed to winter travel, he is comfortable under a meagre weight of clothing. He relies upon vigorous exercise for the development of caloric, and is constantly in motion. A pair of corduroy trousers, a cotton

shirt, a capote, moccasins and a fur cap, constitute his winter costume. His hands are encased in mittaines, but in lieu of underclothing he ties his trousers tightly about the ankle, and the sleeves of his capote closely about the wrists. This, with the gaudy sash always wrapped around his waist, divides his clothing into two air-tight compartments, as it were. If it becomes cold in one, he always has the other in which to take refuge; or, he can loosen his belt, thus turning on a supply of caloric, which equalizes the temperature in both compartments. Lightly clad, he is in excellent trim for running, and seems warm and comfortable while his more heavily appareled companion shakes and shivers on the slightest halt.

Next in importance to personal clothing on the winter journey is transportation; and as the snow is too deep for horses to travel, the only available vehicle remaining is the dog-sledge. Upon this is placed the blankets and pemmican, together with the paraphernalia of the camp. Tents are not used for winter travel, as the huge fires necessary for comfort and even safety could not be made available. In fact, unless it is desirable to make a long halt in any one locality, tents are only an incumbrance to the traveler, without adding proportionately to his comfort. Well sheltered by timber, and with an enormous fire blazing at his feet, sleeping in the open air is generally feasible enough.

As to dogs for his sledge, the traveler follows the custom of the country and takes the best he can get. Every canine in the Fur Land, without regard to age, sex, or previous condition of servitude, hauls a sledge in the winter months; so

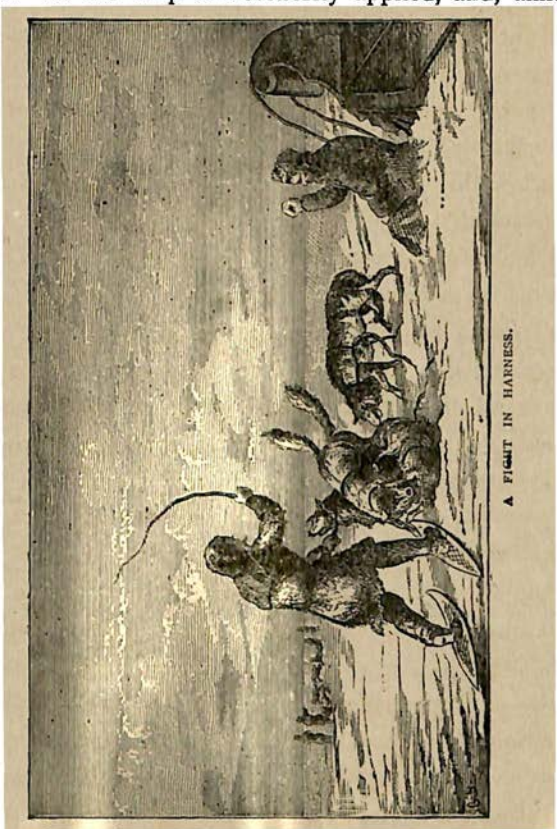
that he has an unlimited opportunity of selection; any one he may take being only the choice of a greater or less evil. He is always careful, however, not to select too many yellow dogs for service in the same train. The fact is, that in hauling the dog is put to a work from which his whole nature revolts; that is to say, the ordinary yellow dog. The result being, that just when one imagines everything to be going on swimmingly, and after he is well wrapped in robes and fairly seated in the sledge, the four yellow dogs in front of him suddenly stop, face about in harness, seat themselves calmly, and with tears in their dark-blue eyes, break forth into howls of regret at their inability to proceed farther. There have been men distinguished for kindness and humanity toward their fellows, and yet who, when placed in circumstances like these, gave way to a sublimated and lurid profanity which would have curled the hair on a bronze idol. For mere dress-parade the yellow dog may do very well, but he is not to be relied upon as a steady and persistent hauler. The experienced traveler generally inclines to a large raw-boned canine of a grisly-grey color, and possessing many of the distinguishing characteristics of the wolf. This fellow is hard to manage, treacherous, and a fierce fighter. When near the settlements, the safety of young calves and pigs necessitate his being securely tied; but he is a strong, untiring, and steady hauler, and his temper can be kept in subjection by the lash.

To assist his own locomotion, the traveler ties on his largest pair of snowshoes, say five feet long and fifteen inches wide. A man can walk much faster on snowshoes,

with a fair track, than on the best road without them; but when the trail is frozen perfectly hard, the traveler casts them off, and runs behind the dogs, who are able to gallop at great speed along the slippery path; and in this manner the most extraordinary journeys have been made. With a crack of the whip, and a harsh command to the dogs, the train moves off. After that, a perpetual shouting and cursing cracking of whips and howling of dogs, seems necessary to keep the cavalcade in motion. And it is scarcely to be wondered at when one comes to consider the conduct of the dogs at the very beginning of the journey.

The start is generally made at a very early hour in the morning; for the traveler invariably accomplishes a good portion of his day's tramp before breakfast. It is, say, two long hours before daybreak when the dogs are put in harness. It is a morning of bitter cold; a faint old moon hangs low down in the east; over the dreary stretch of snow-covered plain a shadowy Aurora flickers across the stars; it is all as wild and cheerless a spectacle as the eye can look upon; and the work of getting the unwilling dogs in their harness is done by the half-breeds in no very amiable mood. In the haste and darkness of the time but scant attention is given to getting the cowering brutes into their proper places in the traces. In consequence, when the traveler assumes charge of his sledge, an ominous tendency to growl and fight tells him that something is wrong in his train. It is too dark to see plainly, but a touch of the cold nose of the leader informs him that the right dog is in the wrong place. It is too late, however, to

rectify the mistake; the half-breeds are already off, and the sound of their dire anathemas grows fainter and fainter upon the ear. So the whip is mercilessly applied, and, amid the



A FIGHT IN HARNESS.

yells of the unhappy brutes, the sledge grinds slowly off through the frozen snow.

But the memory of that mistake rankles in the breast of

the foregoer; and just when a steady pace is attained, and peace seems to have returned to the train, he suddenly countermarches in the harness, and prostrates the unoffending steerdog at his post. The attack, too, is made with so much suddenness and vigor that the wondering victim —who is perfectly contented with the change, having thereby won the easiest place in the train—instantly capitulates, and "turns a turtle" in his traces. The trouble might end here but for the fact that the unlooked-for assault is generally accompanied by a flank movement on the part of the two middle dogs, who, when there is any fighting lying around, are pretty sure to have a tooth in on their own account. And having no particular grudge to take out, but only mad on general principles, they are equally indifferent in attacking the head of the rear dog or the tail of the one in front. This condition of things naturally leads to fearful confusion in the train; they jump on one another; they tangle their traces, and back-bands, and collar-straps, into inextricable knots and interlacings, which baffle the stiffened fingers of the angry traveler to unravel. Frequently they roll themselves into one huge ball, presenting the appearance of a hydra-headed dog, with multitudinous legs and innumerable tails. The rapid application of the whip only seems to make matters worse—conveying the idea to each infuriated dog that he is being badly bitten by an unknown antagonist. The traveler, having tried everything else, and with patience entirely gone, at last in sheer despair, but unwittingly, follows the example of the poet of Perth, who "stoode in ta middle of

ta roade and swoore at lairge ; " having a faint idea, nevertheless, that he is in no way capable of doing justice to the subject. The effect, however, is magical ; the confused train straightens out under illimitable imprecation, with a celerity clearly illustrating the manner of its early training. As for the bewildered traveler, he has unwittingly discovered the true secret of dog-driving.

By the time the mistake is rectified, however, and the dogs are tugging at their moose-skin collars in peaceful equanimity, the traveler's half-breed companions have disappeared in the distance. Extreme cold has a tendency to make men unsocial ; in a fight with the elements, it is each man for himself ; and the traveler knows he will be left alone until the camping-place is reached—possibly till night.

Traveling thus day after day through the intense stillness and solitude of the snow-clad plain, without meeting a sign of man, and rarely seeing a living creature, strikes strangely upon the mind at first. The half-breed or Indian delights in wandering alone ; but the traveler who first tries the experiment, finds the silence and loneliness so oppressive as to be unbearable. He often journeys over a space where no tree or shrub breaks the monotony of the sky-line ; only the unending vision of snow and sky, the vague, distant, and ever-shifting horizon ; the long snow-ridges that seem to be rolled one upon another in motionless torpor, or, in a storm, moving like the long swells of the ocean ; the weird effect of sunrise and sunset, of night limiting the vision to almost nothing, and clothing even that in a spectral, opaque grey; of morning slowly

expanding it to a hopeless, shapeless blank; the sigh and sough of the ceaseless wind, that seems an echo in unison with the immeasurable solitude of which it is the sole voice; and, over all, the constantly growing sense of lonely, never-ending distance, which deepens upon the traveler as morning after morning dawns upon his onward progress under the same fantastic, ever-shifting horizon of snow and sky.

All this becomes doubly intensified to the traveler left alone to shape his course for the day. But the reality of the storm, drift, and desolation, has the excitement of the very pain which they produce. To be lost in the blinding haze of a "poudre day;" to have a spur of icy keenness urging him on to renewed effort; to have the dead weight of that dread inertia, which always accompanies the traveler on northern plains, keeping him down with an iron grasp; to have Despair constantly suggesting the futility of further exertion; to seek with dazed eyes and sickening fears, hour after hour, for the faint print of snowshoe or moccasin upon the snow; to see night approaching, and not a thing of life or shape of shelter within the scope of vision; to urge the tired dogs with whip and voice to fresh exertions, to greater effort in gaining some far-off aspen bluff, or willow copse, ere night shall wrap the dreary scene in darkness; all this is but the reiterated recital of the traveler's daily misery.

In the face of a cold, the intensity of which it is difficult to imagine, he must keep on. Right in his teeth blows the bitter blast; the dogs, with low-bent heads, often face about in the traces, and can only be induced to proceed by repeated

thrashings ; the half-breeds, with blankets wrapped tightly over their heads, bend forward as they walk against the wind. To run is instantly to freeze ; to lie upon the sledge, even for a moment, is to chill the body through to the very marrow. Under these circumstances, the traveler is apt to wonder if the game is worth the candle. He compares himself with all the other adventurers who have gone on fool's errands since the world began, and finds the result very much to his own disadvantage. Like *Touchstone*, he is sorry he came.

"*Ros.* Well, this is the Forest of Arden.

Touch. Ay, now am I in Arden ; the more fool I ; when I was at home, I was in a better place ; but travelers must be content."

Small wonder when, after such a day of toil and hardship, the traveler sees through the gloom the haven he so long has sought—it may be only the camp-fire in the aspen-clump, or the dull glow of a chip-fire in a snow-drift—he hails with intense joy the gleam which tells him of a resting-place. And yet, as he stretches his weary limbs in the snow, or on the soft broom, he laughs at the fatigues and fears which, one short hour before, were heart-sickening enough. Yet so it is.

When the light begins to fade over the silent plain, and the greyish, opaque pall settles slowly down upon the frozen landscape, the traveler looks about him for a good camping-place. A poplar thicket, or a pine bluff, supplies all his requirements—a few dead trees for fuel, a level space for his fire and his blankets, and broom for his bed. Every one sets to work as quickly as possible. One unharnesses the dogs

and unpacks the sledges; another collects dry logs; a third cuts pine chips and starts the fire; while a fourth shovels away the snow in front of the fire with a snowshoe, and strews the cleared ground with the pinebroom. Then all squat down, smoking and superintending the cooking of supper, the hungry dogs seated around anxiously waiting for their share.

A pipe and smoke follow, then the blankets and robes are spread out for the bed. The operation of undressing is reversed, and the traveler literally dresses for the night; covering head and all, and placing his feet as near the fire as he dares. All huddle together as closely as possible, and when silence reigns, the dogs creep softly in toward the fire and lie at the sleepers' feet. Then begins the cold. The mercury in the thermometer placed at the bedside sinks down—down, till it disappears in the bulb, and may be used as a bullet. The traveler is tired with his forty-mile march on snowshoes. Lying down with blistered feet and stiffened limbs, sleep comes to him by the sheer force of fatigue; but the dim consciousness of that frightful cold never for an instant leaves his waking brain; and, as he lies in a huddled heap beneath his robes, he welcomes the short-haired, shivering dog, who, forced from his cold lair in the snow, seeks warmth on the outside of his master's blankets.

Strange as it may appear to those who, living in warm houses and sleeping in cosy rooms from which all draughts are zealously excluded, deem taking one's rest in a poplar thicket, at such a temperature, next to an impossibility, it is

quite the reverse. The men who brave such dangers are made of sterner stuff, and do not perish so easily. On the other hand, it frequently occurs that when, before dawn, the fire again glows ruddily, and the cup of tea is drank hot and strong, the whole discomfort of the night is forgotten —forgotten, perhaps, in the dread anticipation of a cold still more trying in the day's journey to come.

Day after day the same routine of travel is pursued. To rise at three o'clock of the bitterly cold mornings, to start at four, and plod on till dark, halting twice for an hour during the day, is the dull history of each day's toil. No literary skill is able to enliven the dreary monotony of the journey. In front goes a train of dogs, floundering along in the deep snow; then the other trains wind along upon a firmer footing. As the day wanes, the dogs begin to tire, but still go on as gamely as ever. At sundown the trains have straggled widely apart, the weaker ones dropping far to the rear. The dogs begin to look wistfully back at the driver running behind the sledge, who, "filled with strange oaths," only responds to their pathetic appeals with fiercer imprecations. Dogs and men seem to go forward from the mere impulse of progression. All have been tired long since; not partially so, but regularly weary; yet, somehow, the sense of weariness seems to have passed away; the step forward upon the snowshoe is taken by a mere mechanical effort, destitute alike of sense or feeling. Where all is a wilderness, progression means preservation; and sick or sore, weary and blistered, the traveler must push on.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FUR HUNTER.

THE most expert hunters and trappers of fine furs in the Hudson's Bay Territory are the Wood-Indians—Crees, Beavers, and others—and from them are traded the greater portion of the peltries exported by the company. They are of different habits and dispositions from their relatives, the Plain-Indians—a sort of solitary hunters and trappers on foot, contrasted with a race of gregarious horsemen. Generally very peaceable, they pride themselves upon an honesty unknown to their lawless brethren of the prairies; and although great beggars, and inclined to importune one to give them different things to which they may take a fancy, yet they never offer to dispute one's right of ownership. Expert hunters of moose, and occasionally seeking the buffalo, when they enter the skirts of the timber in winter, yet they confine their labors in the main to trapping the smaller furs. As a consequence, they are better clothed and equipped than the Plain-Indians, being able to obtain what they require at the trading-posts in exchange for furs. On the other hand, they often suffer severely from starvation, owing to the increasing scarcity of the larger animals; while the Plain-Indians, following the buffalo, seldom lack food, although

they possess but little marketable property wherewith to buy clothes and luxuries at the forts.

Upon the arrival of the summer and autumn boat-brigades at the different posts throughout the Fur Land, bringing supplies of merchandise for the trade of the ensuing year, it is the custom of the company to issue to their hunters and trappers goods up to a certain amount, to be returned in furs at the end of the season. These advances are generally all made by the month of November, so that the hunters may be in readiness for the season's work.

The different methods by which the Indian succeeds in snaring and trapping animals are many. But as by far the most numerous of the more valuable of the fur-bearing animals of the territory are the marten and mink, to the capture of the former of these two—the sable of the trade—the exertions of the trappers are principally directed. By the beginning of November the animals have got their winter coats, and fur is in season, or "prime," as the phrase is; and the Indian trapper, who has taken up his residence in some favorite locality, now prepares to lay out his trapping-walk. As he has a long tramp before him, and the temperature is below zero, he attires himself in the winter costume of the trapper: a large deer-skin or duffel capote, very much overlapped in front, and fastened about his waist by a brilliant worsted sash, protects his body from the cold; a small rat or fox-skin cap covers his head, while his legs are encased in the ordinary blue-cloth leggin; large moccasins, with two or three pairs of duffel socks—simple squares of blanket cloth—

clothe his feet; and huge mittaines, extending to the elbow, complete his costume. Into his belt he thrusts a small axe or hatchet, which serves as a balance to the huge hunting-knife and fire-bag hanging from the other side. His pack is prepared in the following manner:

In the middle of his blanket he places a piece of pemmican, sufficient for five or six days' consumption; as much tea as he can get; a tin kettle and cup; and, if he be rich, some steel traps, and a little sugar and salt. A gun and ammunition complete his outfit. Doubling the blanket over all, he ties it down upon a small hand-sledge, or tobogan. This hand-sledge is a thin flat slip of wood, from five to six feet long by one broad, and turned up at the end in a considerable curl. It is very light, and the Indians always use it when laying out their walks, or in visiting their traps, for the purpose of carrying their provisions and hauling home the animals or game they may have caught. Tying on a pair of snowshoes, he throws the line of the hand-sledge over his shoulder, and starts alone into the gloomy forest.

A sky of darkness is above, bleak wilds and frozen lakes before him; the recesses of the forest, the icy margins of the lakes must be traversed, for there are the haunts of the sable. Silently forward he trudges; for the trapper can never enliven the solitude of his journey by whistling or a song. The cold is below zero, but the fur will prove all the finer. Nerved by necessity, and stimulated by the love of gain, on he presses. Fatigue and cold exhaust him; a snow-storm overtakes him; the bearings and landmarks are obliterated

and forgotten; sometimes provisions fail, and he who has promised a speedy return is seen no more.

The trapper, be he white man or Indian, of necessity leads a solitary, desolate, and dangerous life. To be alone in the trackless forest demands a courage and endurance of no ordinary kind. The lone trapper knows not the emulation, the wild dash and hurrah of the soldier, as he marches up to the deadly breach; he cannot feel that powerful incentive to be brave arising from the knowledge that a gallant deed will be handed down, with this name, to poserity; he has no opportunity for display before his fellows; alone with nature and his Creator, he is self-dependent, and his indomitable courage can only spring from a firm reliance on his own strength.

As he penetrates the forest, his keen eyes scan every mark upon the snow for the tracks he seeks. The perceptions of the Indian or half-breed are so nice, his attention so constantly on the alert, and his conclusions so rapidly formed, that he draws inferences from general signs with great readiness and accuracy. As a consequence, he reads signs left behind by a passing animal as readily and truly as if he had been personally present and witnessed the whole scene. It matters little whether they are fresh or half obliterated; he never makes a mistake in his perusal of the language of tracks—marks left printed in that book the hunter knows so well—the face of Nature. When he observes the footprints of marten or fisher, he unstraps his pack, and sets to work to construct a wooden trap in the following manner:—

Having cut down a number of saplings, he shapes them into stakes of about a yard in length. These are driven into the ground so as to form a small circular palisade or fence, in the shape of half an oval, cut transversely. Across the entrance to this little enclosure, which is of a length to admit about two-thirds of the animal's body, and too narrow to permit it to fairly enter in and turn around, a thick limb or thin tree-trunk is laid, with one end resting on the ground. A tree of considerable size is next felled, stripped of its branches, and so laid that it rests upon the log at the entrance in a parallel direction. Inside the circle a small forked stick holds a bit of dried meat, or a piece of partridge or squirrel, as a bait. This is projected horizontally into the enclosure, and on the outer end of it rests another short stick, placed perpendicularly, which supports the large tree laid across the entrance. The top of the trap is then covered over with bark and branches, so that the only means of access to the bait is by the opening between the propped-up tree and the log beneath. It is a guillotine with a tree instead of a knife.

The marten or fisher creeps under the tree and seizes the bait. Finding himself unable to pull it off, he backs out, still tugging at the forked stick to which the bait is attached. Just as the centre of his back comes under the fall or tree, he loosens the baited stick, which lets slip the small supporting one, which in turn lets fall the large horizontal log. Down it comes on his back, killing him instantly, but doing no injury to the fur. Wherever marten tracks are plentiful in the snow, a deadfall is erected; an expert trapper being able to

make forty or fifty of them in a day. These he scatters over a long line of country, it may be ten or fifteen miles in length. Once a week he starts forth to visit this line of deadfalls, gathering the furs taken, repairing the broken traps and setting them again.

The numerous lakes and swamps in the forest are always sought by the trapper, not only because they enable him to travel more rapidly, and penetrate further into the less hunted regions, but also because the edges of the lakes and the portages between them are the favorite haunts of the fox, the fisher, and the mink. Where the lakes are shallow, the water apparently freezes to the bottom, except in the deepest parts, where air or breathing holes exist in the ice. The water in these holes is crowded with myriads of fish, most of them of small size, but so closely packed that they cannot move freely. On thrusting in an arm, it seems like plunging it into a mass of thick mud. The snow in the vicinity is beaten down as hard and level as a road, by the numbers of animals which flock to these Lenten feasts. Tracks converge from every side; here the footprints of the cross and silver-fox, delicately impressed in the snow as he trots daintily along with light and airy tread; the rough marks of the clumsier fisher; the clear, sharply-defined track of the active mink; and the great coarse trail of the ubiquitous, ever-galloping wolverine. Around the margins of these lakes the trapper erects his deadfalls, certain of securing an abundant harvest.

STEEL TRAPS.

Beavers, wolves, foxes, lynx, and the other larger animals, are generally caught by the steel trap. These traps resemble the ordinary rat-trap, except that they are larger, have no teeth, and the springs are double. Those used for wolves and lynx, especially, are of very large size, and the springs are so powerful that it requires all the force of a strong man to set them. A chain is attached to one spring, with a ring at the free extremity, through which a stout stake is passed, or a weight fastened, and left otherwise unattached. When the animal is caught, he carries the trap for a short distance, but is soon brought up by the stake or weight becoming entangled across the trees or fallen timbers. The track in the snow soon leads to his discovery by the hunter. In setting the trap, it is generally placed so that the jaws, when spread out flat, are exactly on a level with the snow: the chain and stake both being carefully hidden, and a thin layer of snow carefully sprinkled over the top of the trap itself. Fragments of meat are then scattered about, and the place smoothed down so as to leave no trace. The fox or wolf, feeding about, generally gets one leg in the trap, sometimes both legs at once, and occasionally the nose. The trapper prefers catching the animal by two legs if possible, as then there is not the slightest possibility of escape; whereas, the fox caught by one leg, often eats it off close to the trap and escapes on the other three. The stump soon heals up again, and becomes covered with hair. When caught by the nose, they are almost certain to escape, owing to its wedge-like shape, unless taken out of the trap very soon after

being caught. The wolf is the most difficult animal to catch in the steel trap, being so sagacious that he will scrape all round one, let it be ever so well set, and after eating all the bait, walk away unhurt. The hunter catches them, however, by setting two traps close together, so that, when the wolf scrapes at one, he is almost certain to get his foot in the other.

In the remoter districts many of the larger fur-bearing animals are caught by means of the poisoned bait. These are simply small pieces of meat into the centre of which strychnine has been inserted by means of a small hole. When frozen it is impossible to distinguish any difference in appearance between them and the harmless ones. The baits are purposely made very small, so that, in the ordinary course, they will be bolted whole, and are scattered along the paths traversed by the animals. Poison is rarely used, however, in the vicinity of settlements, owing to the danger of destroying valuable train-dogs, or upon the open prairie, where it is liable to poison the grasses, and so become dangerous to horses and cattle. Wire and twine nets are also frequently used in trapping furs, though principally directed against the lynx, or wild cat.

Though well nigh extinct in many parts of the Fur Land, yet in others the beaver has held his own against all comers. Nearly thirty thousand of these little builders are annually caught along the shores and swampy shallows of Peace River, notwithstanding the fact that they are a very difficult animal to trap. A shallow lake is their favorite place of abode.

Along its edges, where rushes and sedgy plants appear above the ice and snow, rise a number of small earthy mounds, while around it the trees are felled in all directions, as if the land had been cleared for farming. This is a beaver colony. In summer and autumn the spot is a lively place enough, but in winter there are no signs of animal life, the beaver keeping within doors.

Arrived upon the ground, the trapper knows at a glance the various signs of the animal's presence. Cutting down a few stakes, he proceeds to point them at the ends; and then breaking the ice from around the beaver-lodges, he drives them between it and the shore. This prevents the beaver from running along the passage which they always keep from their lodges to the shore, where their storehouse is located, and imprisons those now in the lodge. The trapper next stakes up those in the storehouse on shore in the same manner, and thus imprisons those who may have fled there for shelter, on hearing the sound of the axe at the lodge. Then, taking his axe, he cuts through the lodge; no very easy matter, owing to the vast amount of frozen sticks and mud of which it is constructed. At last, laying bare the interior of the structure, he reaches in his hand, gives a pull, and out comes a fat sleepy beaver, which he flings upon the snow. A blow upon the head from the axe puts an end to it, and the operation is again repeated, until all the inmates are killed and packed upon the hand-sledge. For the Indian gorges on fat beaver, and never throws away the meat.

If it is the early autumn, however, and the ice has not

yet formed about the beaver-lodges, the hunter catches the animal in a steel trap. He first finds out how the beaver gets into his home, which is generally in shallow water. Then a steel trap is sunk in the water, care being taken to regulate the depth, so that it may not be more than twelve or fourteen inches below the surface. This is accomplished by either rolling in a log, or building in large stones. Immediately over the trap is the bait, made from the castor or medicine gland of the beaver, suspended from a stick, so as to just clear the water. With a long cord and a buoy, to mark the position of the trap when the beaver swims away with it, the trap is complete. The unsuspecting beaver, returning to his lodge, scents the tempting castor, purposely placed in his road. As he cannot reach it as he swims, he feels about with his hind-legs for something to stand on. This, too, has been carefully placed for him. Putting down his feet to stretch up for the coveted morsel, he finds them suddenly clasped in an iron embrace; there is no hope of escape. The log, revealing his hiding-place, is seized by the trapper, the imprisoned beaver dispatched by a single blow on the head, and the trap set again. A trapper will sometimes spend many weeks encamped near a good beaver village.

The most dire and untiring enemy of the fur-hunter is the wolverine, or North American Glutton—following his footsteps, and destroying the martens after they are caught. This curious animal is rather larger than the badger, with a long body, stoutly and compactly made, mounted on exceedingly short legs of great strength. His feet, large and

powerful, are armed with sharp, curved claws. Voracious and blood-thirsty, there hardly lives a more cunning and crafty animal. During the winter months he obtains a livelihood by availing himself of the labors of the trapper. With untiring perseverance he hunts day and night for the trail of man, and when it is found, follows it unerringly, until he arrives at one of the wooden traps. Avoiding the door, he speedily tears open an entrance at the back, and seizes the bait with impunity. If the trap contains an animal, he drags it out, and, with wanton malevolence, tears it and hides it in the underbrush, or in the top of some lofty pine. When hard pressed by hunger, he occasionally devours it. In this manner he demolishes a whole series of traps; and when once a wolverine has established himself on a trapping-walk, the hunter's only chance of success is to change ground, and build a fresh lot of traps, trusting to secure a few furs before his new path is found out by his industrious enemy.

Such serious injury does the wolverine inflict, that he has received from the Indians the name of Kekwaharkess, or "The Evil One." Strange stories are related by the trappers of the extraordinary cunning of this animal, which they believe to possess a wisdom almost human. He is never caught by the ordinary deadfall. Occasionally one is poisoned, or caught in a steel trap; but his strength is so great that it requires a strong trap to hold him. He seems even to suspect the poisoned bait, and bites in two and tastes every morsel before swallowing it.

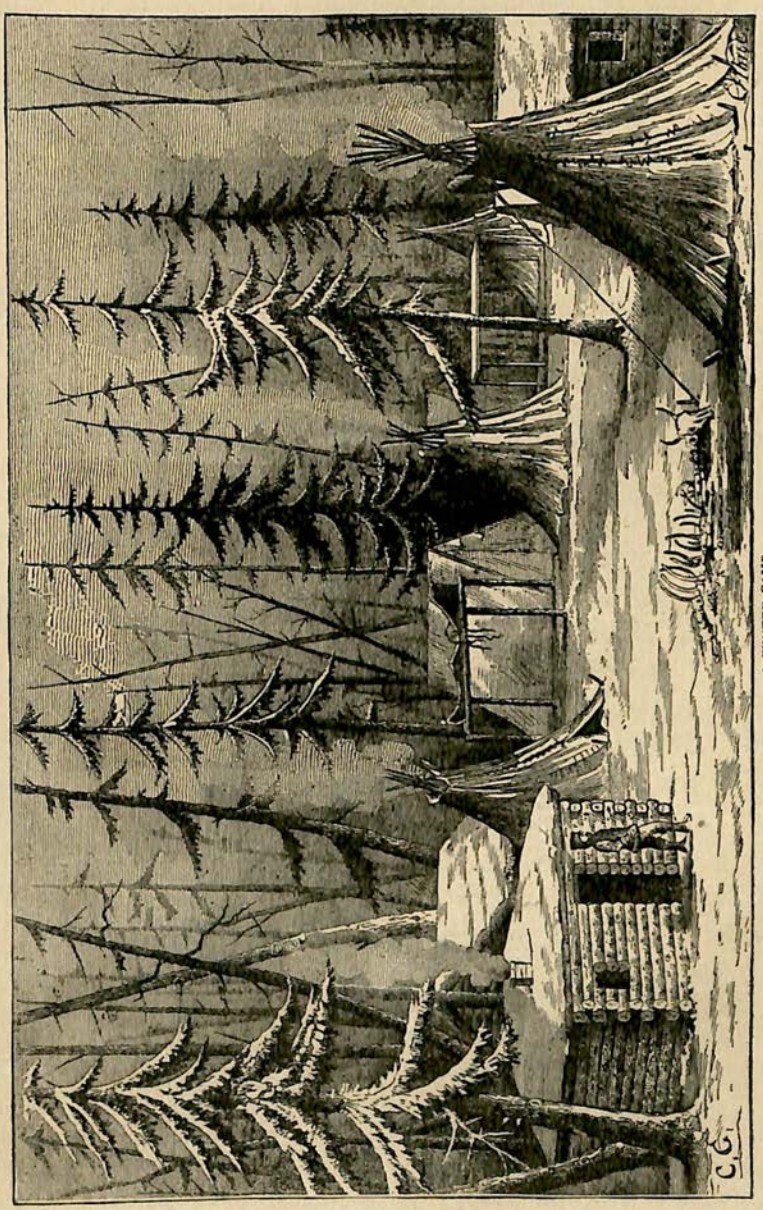
Despite the hardships and fatigues which attend it, there

is something strangely attractive in the trapper's life. The grand beauty of the forest whose pines, some of which tower up over two hundred feet in height, are decked and mantled in snow, and where no sound is heard, except the explosions of trees cracking with the intense frost, excites admiration and stimulates curiosity. The interest in the pursuit is constantly kept up, by the observance of tracks, the interpretation of their varied stories, and the accounts of the different habits of the animals as related by one's wild companions. There is also no small amount of excitement in visiting the traps previously made, to see whether they contain the looked-for prize, or whether all the fruits of hard labor have been destroyed by the vicious wolverine. But on the other hand, the long laborious march, loaded with a heavy pack, and covered with a quantity of thick clothing, through snow and woods beset with fallen timber and underbrush, is fatiguing enough. Provisions usually fall short, and the trapper subsists, in a great measure, on the animals captured to obtain the fur. As soon as the skins of the marten and fisher are removed, their bodies are stuck on the end of a stick, and put to roast before the fire, looking for all the world like so many skewered cats. The only change in the fatiguing monotony is the work of making traps, or the rest in camp at night.

Selecting a large pine-tree for his night camp, the trapper scrapes away the snow from about its roots with a snowshoe. Clearing a space seven or eight feet in diameter, and nearly four feet deep, he cuts the pinebroom from the ends of the

branches above him, and strews them at the bottom of the hollow, till the snow is covered. This done, he collects a huge pile of firewood and heaps it about the foot of the tree. The ruddy flame glances up among the branches overhead, and sends a myriad of sparks into the air. The sombre forest undergoes a sudden and magical transformation. Before, it was cold, silent, gloomy, desolate, and the pale snow looked spectral in the dark. Now, the thick stems of the trees are bathed in a genial glow, which penetrates the branches above, tinting those near the fire with a ruby tinge. The white snow changes to a beautiful pink, while the tree-trunks, bright and clearly visible close at hand, become more and more indistinct in the distance, till they are lost in the gloom. The snow walls about the trapper sparkle as if set with diamonds. They do not melt as might be expected; the cold is too intense for that, and nothing melts except the snow quite close to the fire.

Lying on a soft elastic couch of pine boughs, at his feet a roaring fire of great trees heaped high, from which arises an enormous cloud of smoke and steam, the hunter, wrapped in his blanket, sleeps in peace. Sometimes, however, when the cold is very intense, or the wind blows strongly, a single blanket is poor protection. The huge fire is inadequate to prevent the freezing of one extremity, while it scorches the other. Sleep is impossible, or if obtained, is quickly broken by an aching cold in every limb as the fire burns low.



A WINTER CAMP.

CHAPTER XII.

A WINTER CAMP.

JOURNEYING along the line of open country extending between the North Saskatchewan River and the great forest region stretching out toward the Polar Sea, in company with a party of half-breed plain-hunters, we reached, one dreary evening in November, one of those curious communities which are to be found in winter only along the borders of the great plains of the Fur Land. Nothing like them exists on the plains of the United States territories, because the peculiar nomadic population necessary to their being is lacking. On the south side of the forty-ninth parallel there are comparatively few half-breeds; on the north side there are half-breeds whose great-grandfathers were half-breeds.

Situated in the sparse timber bordering a small tributary of the Saskatchewan, the community consisted of French half-breed hunters engaged in the usual winter quest of buffalo. It was a picturesque though not over cleanly place, and will probably look better in a photograph than it did in reality. Some thirty or forty huts crowded irregularly together, and built of logs, branches of pine-trees, raw-hides, and tanned and smoked skins, together with the inevitable *tepee*, or Indian lodge; horses, dogs, women and children, all intermingled in

a confusion worthy of an Irish fair; half-breed hunters, rib-boned, leggined, tasseled and capoted, lazy, idle, and, if liquor was to be had, sure to be drunk; remnants and wrecks of buffaloes lying everywhere around; here a white and glistening skull, there a disjointed vertebra but half denuded of its flesh; robes stretched upon a framework of poles and drying in the sun; meat piled upon stages to be out of the way of dogs; wolf-skins, fox-skins, and other smaller furs, tacked against the walls of the huts, or stretched upon miniature frames hanging from the branches of trees; dusky women drawing water and hewing wood; and at dark, from every little hut, the glow of firelight through the parchment windows, the sparks glimmering and going out at the chimney-tops, the sound of violin scraped and sawed by some long-haired Paganini, and the quick thud of moccasined heel, as Baptiste, or François, or Pierrette footed it ceaselessly on the puncheon-covered floor.

Inside the huts a bare floor of pounded earth, or half-hewn boards; in one corner a narrow bed of boughs, covered deep with buffalo robes; a fireplace of limited dimensions, a few wooden trunks or cassettes; a rude table and a few blackened kettles; on the walls an armory of guns, powder-horns and bullet-bags; on the rafters a myriad of skins. Every hut was the temporary home of several families, and we have slept in structures of this kind, of not more than twelve by fifteen feet in superficial area, where the families ranged from fifteen to twenty members, of all ages and both sexes. It might be useful to investigate the influence of this

mode of life upon manners; whatever may be the result upon the coarser sex, its effect upon women and children is not so lamentable as may be supposed; no perceptible lowering of tone or compromising of taste follows, nor does the nature of young girls, thus exposed to the gaze of an indiscriminate crowd, change as much as might be expected; the hereditary sentiment, "*honi soit qui mal y pense*," is too deeply seated for that.

As a rule the winter hunters are of French origin, descendants of the old traders and trappers of the Northwest and X. Y. Fur Companies, though by long intermarriage the blood of three or four nationalities often mingles in their veins. Their grandfathers have been French-Canadian, their grandmothers Cree or Ojibway squaws; English and Blackfeet and Assiniboine have contributed to their descent on the mother's side.

Now, as in the olden time of the fur-trade, there is no uniform price for squaws, their qualifications being taken into account, and a price demanded in accordance with their capacity to render service. Usually one may be purchased for a pony, a small quantity of flour and sugar, a little tobacco and a bottle of whisky. But woe to the purchaser if he should make his abode at any point convenient of access to the band to which his squaw belonged. While she is with the tribe the squaw is kicked about and whipped by any one that takes a notion to do so. When she becomes the white man's squaw things are different. There is not an Indian she meets who does not claim relationship with her. She is sister

to most of them and first cousin to the remainder. They meet her with a kiss, and she feels that she must ask them in to dinner, and give each one something to remember her by. The result of all this is, that the white man soon finds that he has married an entire Indian tribe, and has made an *ante-mortem* distribution of his property.

Many of the women in the winter camp were clearly of unmixed Indian blood. Their general occupation, like that of all the married women in the camp, when not engaged in culinary duties, seemed to be the dissemination of nourishment from the maternal font to swarms of children. This maternal occupation among the half-breeds is protracted to an advanced age of childhood, a circumstance probably due to the fact that for four days after its birth the newly-born infant receives no nourishment from its mother, in order that in after life it shall be able to withstand the pangs of hunger. The infantile mind, doubtless being conscious that it has been robbed of its just right, endeavors to make up for lost time by this prolongation of the term of nursing. In a similar manner the half-breed doubtless obtains his appetite for strong drink from the fact that the first thing administered to him after birth is a spoonful of strong port wine, or even spirits, in order to insure him a vigorous constitution in after life. From the persistency with which he follows this practice as he grows older it is only fair to suppose that he is insuring himself a vigor of constitution which will carry him into the nineties.

Children, however, eat freely of buffalo or other meat. In fact, half-breed and Indian life know only two seasons—

the feast time and the famine. When in camp in the neighborhood of the buffalo-herds, or other game, living on the fattest hump and tongues, the moose nose, or the daintiest tidbit of forest and stream; when on the march, glad to get a scrap of dried meat or a putrid fish to appease the cravings of hunger. While the meat lasts, life is one long dinner. A child scarce able to crawl is seen with one hand holding a piece of meat, the other end of which is tightly held between the teeth, while the right hand wields a knife with which it saws away between fingers and lips till the mouthful is detached. We have never seen a native minus his nose, but how noses escape amputation under these circumstances is an unexplained mystery.

The amount of meat consumed in a winter camp is simply enormous. In every hut feasting is kept up from morning till night, and it is impossible to enter the dwelling of a half-breed without being invited to dine. As a refusal is regarded in the light of an intentional slight to the host, it happens that the unwary guest goes about in a highly surfeited condition. The invitation to eat forms, however, the most prominent feature of half-breed hospitality, and is always extended in the kindest and politest manner. If spirits are attainable, the feast sometimes occupies a secondary position, but in one form or the other the stranger within the gates is invariably invited and expected to participate. With the half-breeds themselves the custom is invariable, and no well-regulated *metis* expects to leave his neighbor's door without a feast of the best viands in the house. And a feast with this hybrid personage means no small draft upon the larder, for, if the half-breed can starve better than any other man,

he can equally surpass other men in the quantity of food which he can consume at a sitting. For long days and nights he can go without any food at all; but catch him in camp when the buffalo are near and the cows are fat, and you will learn what a half-breed can do in the way of eating.

Here is one bill of fare, as given by a traveler in the North,* which may seem incredible, and yet we can vouch for it as not being a whit exaggerated: "Seven men in thirteen days consumed two buffalo-bulls, seven cabri deer, fifty pounds of pemmican—equal to half a buffalo—and a great many ducks and geese, and on the last day there was nothing to eat. This enormous quantity of meat could not have weighed less than sixteen hundred pounds at the very lowest estimate, which would have given a daily ration to each man of eighteen pounds!" Incredible as this may seem, it is by no means impossible in a severe climate and living the active life these men lead. We remember camping one evening with three half-breed plain-hunters beside a buffalo-calf they had killed shortly before dusk. The men began cutting the animal up and feasting upon it. They were eating when we retired for the night, and were still hovering over the fire when we arose early in the morning. With the exception of the head, which was slowly roasting upon the coals, there was nothing left of the calf except the bones!

As an instance of what the half-breed regards as abstemiousness, a certain missionary once told us that one of his people came to him one day, and with great gravity and seriousness said: "I know that Christianity is true; that it is

* Major Butler, "Great Lone Land."

the great, the best religion—much better, very much better than the pagan, my old religion. Now," said he, "when I was a pagan and followed my old ways—the religion of my mothers—I could eat eight rabbits for my dinner, and then was not satisfied. But since I have become a Christian, and follow the new way, six rabbits at a time is plenty for me; I don't want any more!"

So well is their tremendous power of digestion, and the real necessities of their nomadic life, known to the Hudson's Bay Company, that the daily ration issued by that corporation to its half-breed *voyageurs* and hunters is ten pounds of beef per man, five pounds per woman, and three pounds per child, regardless of age! Beef is so much stronger food than buffalo-meat that ten pounds of the former would be equivalent to fifteen pounds of the latter, and so on in proportion. Beef is, of course, only used near the settlements and is not regarded as equal in any respect to wild meat. The diet of the company's servants depends much, however, upon the district in which they serve, although the amount in any locality is equally enormous. In the plain or Saskatchewan district the ration is almost wholly of buffalo-meat, either fresh or in pemmican. In all the other districts, while pemmican is issued when procurable, the regular ration is the game supplied by the neighborhood. On the south shores of Hudson's Bay, where wild-fowl abound, each man receives for his day's food one wild-goose; in the lake district or English River, three large whitefish; in the Arctic region, two fish and five pounds of reindeer-meat; on the Pacific

coast, eight rabbits or one salmon; in the Athabasca district, eight pounds of moose-meat. All this in periods of plenty.

When the meal gets low in the bin, and the oil in the cruse fails, the half-breed goes hungry with an indifference to the existence of gastric juices that is affecting to behold. But no amount of starvation has the effect of making him reserve from present plenty for future scarcity. The idea of saving for the inevitable rainy morrow is entirely foreign to his nature. It is useless to tell the plain-hunters that the winter is long, and that the buffalo might move out of range, and want stare them in the face; they seem to regard starvation as an ordinary event to be calculated upon certainly, and that so long as any food is to be obtained it is to be eaten at all times; when that is gone—well, then the only thing is to do without. This is the universal half-breed logic: let us eat, drink and be merry, lest to-morrow we cannot; and it is in perfect keeping with the simplicity and cunning, faith, fun, and selfishness which are mingled in the half-breed's mental composition.

As a consequence of so general a commingling of the sexes in the many huts of the winter camp, it occurs that when the young men are not engaged in dancing or feasting they are usually making love; and as there is a large number of young women and girls in every camp, each family rejoicing in the possession of several, the wooings of the dusky Pyramuses and tawny Thisbes is going on continually, and without exciting any particular comment. Many of the

women are very handsome, but run the gamut of color from a clear white of the Caucasian type to the deep and dirty copper-color of the Indian. They receive the attention of their lovers, we are bound to say, with a degree of propriety and maiden coyness which reflects much honor upon their native modesty, situated as they are. As no opportunity is offered for retirement or privacy, the love-making is carried on in the presence of all the other occupants of the room, and very frequently each corner of the single apartment will have its couple whispering soft nothings, to be heard, of course, by all the rest. To civilized young persons, no doubt, a courtship pursued under these depressing circumstances would be trying to the utmost; but François and Philomel are not in the least embarrassed by having their conversation overheard, and they caress each other, and call pet names, as if there were no ears within a mile of them.

François or Gabriel generally comes early in the evening, and having been duly embraced and handshaken by the entire family, is at once invited to dine. The fact of it being past the dinner hour makes no difference, as the invitation is extended in accordance with hospitable custom. The father of Philomel takes his seat at table with his guest, being in duty bound to eat with every one he entertains, and the female members of the family wait upon them. Both proceed to make themselves omnipresent as far as possible. Their fingers are everywhere, and ignoring such confining influences as knives and forks, they soon attain an enviable state of greasiness. During the progress of the meal the host is

untiring in his efforts to overload his guest with buffalo-hump and tea. He informs him that he eats no more than a sparrow; that it is a constant mystery to him how he is able to preserve life at all on so small a quantity of food; that he confidently expects him to become a saint in glory ere long, but intends doing his best not to let him go up from his roof by reason of starvation; that Philomel has an appetite something like his own, and that it has been a cause of anxiety to him all her life long. While thus commiserating his guest's poor appetite, *mon pere* is rapidly and bountifully helping himself, and makes amends for what he is pleased to call his visitor's abstemiousness. When both have eaten enough to cause immediate surfeit, and the father-in-law in prospect is blue in the face, a smoke is suggested.

While the smoking is going on Philomel deftly sweeps from the table the remnants of the repast, and retires to a corner of the apartment by herself. Here, when the fumigation is over, the enamored Gabriel joins her, and his doing so is a signal for the rest of the family to become suddenly unconscious of their presence. This oblivion does duty on such occasions for a separate apartment. Whatever incidents of a tender nature occur are supposed to be invisible to any person save the principals. Everybody acts on this theory. Even the respected but dissipated host produces his black bottle with the hoarded store of rum, and drinks it himself under the assumed belief that his young guest is in the next room. The small brothers-in-law that are to be, indulge in a rather vindictive skirmish over a moccasin-game in utter

ignorance of any bodily presence; and the seven sisters of Philomel criticise the cut of her lover's garments, and the classic but retiring beauty of his countenance with a charming unconsciousness of his close proximity. Philomel, plastic and pliable Philomel, is in no manner abashed at being wooed in the presence of her relatives, and even becomes herself the wooer on discovering that Gabriel is in a certain degree timid. She intimates by caresses of the hand that they are alone, and converses in a tone of voice sufficiently loud to dispel the idea that they can be overheard. If Gabriel recovers courage in some measure, he looks upon Philomel admiringly, as he would upon any other thing of beauty, and it is not long before she becomes conscious of the observation. Then it is a study to watch the airs assumed by this half-breed belle. She is as well versed in the masonry of her sex as if born with a white skin and reared in Madison Square. There is no difference in her mode of action; the only difference is in the effect.

Gabriel, unless he is an adept at the business, cannot entirely rid himself of the depressing effect of twelve pairs of eyes taking in his glances. He is, in consequence, not so susceptible to her wiles as he would be if otherwise situated. At first he limits his love-making to affectionate looks, caresses, and the simpler forms of speech which convey to her the knowledge that she is the light of his eyes. As the evening advances, and his embarrassment wears off, he ventures upon remarks of a more intensely passionate nature, indicative of his love and desire to be first in her affections.

The mixed language spoken by the lovers affords an unlimited supply of diminutives; and Gabriel may call his sweetheart by the names of almost all the animal creation, and yet use but legitimate pet names. In the Cree tongue he may address her as his musk-ox, or, if he desires to become more tender, may call her his musk-rat with equal propriety. By a blending of two Indian tongues she becomes a beautiful wolverine, and a standard but commonplace love-name is "my little pig."

The half-breed's pet names have all been taken from those of animals that seem to be especially innocent or beautiful in his eyes; and the fact that different persons have different standards of beauty and innocence has led to the invention of an almost unlimited vocabulary of diminutives. When the lady-love is inclined to be stout, the names of the larger animals are chosen, and rather liked by her upon whom they are conferred. We remember that one woman was affectionately called the Megatherium, a name that clung to her for months, as being peculiarly the representative of ideal love.

After the lovers have passed a considerable time in this manner alone, as it were, the sisters and other female relatives of Philomel evince an inclination to take part in the wooing. They participate in the conversation by almost imperceptible degrees; then gather by slow approaches into the corner set apart for the courting; and at last become a radiant but tawny group, sparkling and scintillating in the humor of the heathen tongues. They resolve themselves

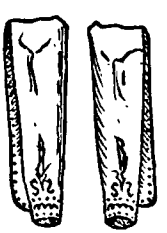
into a species of whippers-in; condole with each other upon the prospective loss of their dear sister; congratulate Gabriel upon having gained the affections of so irreproachable a maiden as Philomel, and feel assured that their lives will be one of unalloyed happiness. In this way the half-breed lover is wafted into matrimony with a facility and dispatch not easily excelled by her fairer sisters of paved avenues.

After a short season of courtship, the anticipated mother-in-law contributes to the certainty of the matrimonial venture by exhibiting. with commendable pride, the household goods which are to accompany Philomel upon her departure from the domestic fold. A feather bed, certain articles of embroidered clothing, highly decorated moccasins, and sundry pieces of earthenware and tin, constitute the whole. To this the host adds a trade-musket, which, he says, has been used by him in the chase, and has been destined from the period of earliest infancy as a present to the fortunate winner of Philomel. He takes occasion, at the same time, to produce the black bottle, and ask the pleasure of drinking the health of his prospective son-in-law, which he does in a demonstratively paternal way affecting to behold.

If Gabriel seems to be overcome by the beneficence of the family, and the threatening prospects of immediate matrimony, and relapses into quietude and sombre thought, his host insists that he must be suffering from hunger again, and expresses his wonder that he has been able to keep up so long. As the half-breed idea of hospitality consists in oft repeated food and drink, Gabriel knows that it is useless as

well as impolitic to refuse, and is accordingly made the recipient of more buffalo-hump and tea, which leaves him in a surfeited and numbed condition, and quite willing to be married out of hand. From this time on Gabriel is, so to speak, an engaged man. As the evenings return. he repairs to the corner of the room where the placid Philomel awaits him, and again the imaginary walls are reared up, rendering it an apartment of itself. Here he may hurl amatory adjectives and noun substantives at her brow to his heart's content; for there comes a day in the near future when they must repair to the priest, and when Philomel will remove the gaudy handkerchief from her head, and wear it crossed meekly upon her breast in token of her wifehood.

Against this marriage day Gabriel accumulates rich store of buffalo-meat and Jamaica rum, and, if possible, a fine-cloth capote of cerulean hue, and ornamental leggins of bewildering beadwork; for the unmarried half-breed in the consummation of his toilet first pays attention to his legs. His cap may be old, his capote out at the elbows, but his leggins must be without spot or blemish. A leggin of dark-blue cloth, extending to the knee, tied at the top with a gaudy garter of worsted-work, and having a broad stripe of heavy bead or silk-work running down the outer seam, is his insignia of respectability.



HALF-BREED LEGGINS.

Gabriel's marriage generally takes place in the winter, when the cares of existence are lightened by reason of ad-

vances made him upon the labor of the ensuing season, or a generous supply of provisions in hand from the late fall hunt. On the appointed day he makes a present of a few ponies, or a quantity of provisions, to his prospective father-in-law, and, accompanied by the paternal blessing and a numerous crowd of friends, repairs with Philomel to the chapel, where the offices of some spiritual father make the twain one flesh. The ceremony over, all persons concerned repair to the residence of Baptiste, or Pascal, or Antoine, who has agreed for a consideration to permit the wedding festivities to be held in his house. Everybody is free to attend the feasting and dancing which follow. When the festivities are over the happy couple begin life upon a capital stock of a pony or two, a few kettles, a pair of blankets, a trading-gun, and are happy.

Attached to every winter camp, and forming part and parcel of it, is a considerable following of Indian hangers-on. These picturesque vagabonds constitute the rags and remnants of the camp dress, as it were, and vary the jollity and dissipation of their half-breed brethren by their more grave and sombre demeanor. Most "grave and reverend seigniors" are they, who stalk through the squalid huts and tepees of the encampment like green and yellow apparitions, or melancholy gods of bile from a dyspeptic's inferno.

Occasionally they join themselves permanently to the camp, and their dusky and aquiline features at length come to assume a certain degree of individuality; but for the most part they are sunny-day friends, only seeking the dissi-

pations of the hunting-camps when the stages are well loaded with hump, and brisket and ribs, and disappearing when want and scarcity usurp the place of plenty. For these children of the forest and plain well know that the winter camp is the most perfect socialist and communistic community in the world. Its members hold every article of food in common. A half-breed is starving, and the rest of the camp want food. He kills a buffalo, and to the last bit the coveted food is shared by all. There is but a thin rabbit, a piece of dried fish, or an old bit of raw-hide in the hut, and the red or white stranger comes and is hungry; he gets his share, and is first served and best attended. If a child starves in the camp, one may know that in every hut, famine reigns, and gaunt hunger dwells in every stomach. When the time comes, the Indian shares his last morsel with the rest; but so long as the meat of his half-breed brethren lasts, he is content to remain in a complete state of destitution as regards food of his own. In other words, he finds it easier to hunt buffalo on the half-breed's stages than on the bleak plains in mid-winter.

Coming in from the wrack and tempest, and finding the camp stages well stocked with food, the Indian begins to starve immediately. At all hours of the day and night the men, the squaws and the children, form doleful processions to the huts for food. An Indian never knocks at the door; he simply lifts the latch, enters edgeways, shakes hands all round, then seats himself, without a word, upon the floor. One may be at breakfast, at dinner or in bed, it doesn't mat-

ter—he will wait. With the pangs of hunger gnawing at his stomach, and viewing, no doubt with longing eyes, the food around, he yet, according to Indian etiquette, refrains from clamoring at once for food, but sits and smokes for a long time without making the slightest allusion to his suffering condition. When, in due course, his host offers him something to eat, he mentions the wants of himself and family, that he has not eaten for so many hours, and so forth. He seems exceedingly grateful for the assistance, and promises to return in a day or two and repay the obligation—a promise which he never fulfills.

If there is any liquor about the camp, the Indian is always the first to find it and the last to leave it. He divines its presence instinctively. He brings his marten-skins, his fish, or whatever he may happen to have, and insists upon having his share; and it does not answer to dilute it too much for his use. It must be strong enough to be inflammable, for he always tests it by pouring a few drops in the fire. If it possesses the one property from which he has given it the name of fire-water, he is satisfied, whatever its flavor or other qualities may be. A very little suffices to upset him, and when intoxicated he is the most irrepressible being a quiet man can possibly have about him. He chuckles and hugs his tin pot, exclaiming: "Tarpoy! tarpoy!" (It is true! it is true!) scarcely able to believe the delightful fact. When he begins to sober up, he will sell the shirt off his back for another drain of the beloved poison. Failing to get it, he pours hot water into the cup, in which the rum has been, and

drinks it to obtain the slight flavor which still clings to it; often filling and emptying it half a dozen times before being fully satisfied that the scent of the distilled molasses has long ago left it.

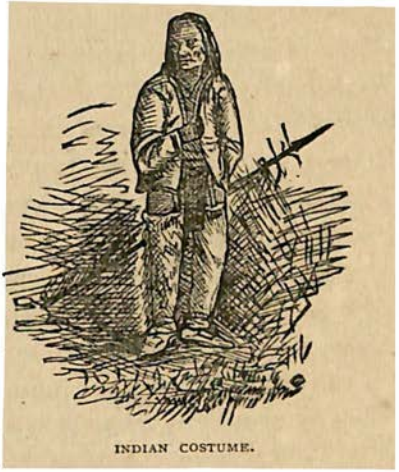
The Indian's habitation is seldom in the camp itself. He generally places his lodge of skins or bark a little way off in the forest, and keeps a narrow path beaten to the open space. His dwelling, inside or out, always presents the same spectacle: battered-looking dogs of all ages surround the lodge; in the low branches of the trees, or upon a stage, meat, snowshoes, dog-sledges, etc., lie safe from canine ravage. Inside, from seven to fifteen persons hover over the fire burning in the centre. Meat, cut into thin slices, hangs drying in the upper smoke; the inevitable puppy dogs play with sticks; the fat, greasy children pinch the puppy dogs, drink on all fours out of a black kettle, or saw off mouthfuls of meat between fingers and lips; the squaws, old and young, engage in cooking, or in nursing with a nonchalance which appals the modest stranger. Such is the lodge of the Indian hanger-on; sometimes a pleasant place enough to while away an hour in study of the aboriginal character, for the appropriate gestures and expressive pantomime with which an Indian illustrates his speech renders it easy to understand. One learns without much difficulty to interpret the long hunting stories with which they while away the evenings in camp. The scenes described are nearly all acted; the motions of the game, the stealthy approach of the hunter, the taking aim, the shot, the cry of the animal, or the noise

of its dashing away, and the pursuit, are all given as the tale goes on.

Associating with the aborigines entirely, one rapidly picks up their language, and in a little time can speak it fluently if not grammatically. Nothing is easier than to get a decent smattering of the Indian languages, although the construction of most of them is extremely intricate. The names of many articles is the explanation of their use or properties, the word being a combination of a participle and a noun, the latter meaning generally "a thing." Thus a cup is called a drinking-thing, a gun a shooting-thing, etc. Especially does this apply to articles introduced by the whites, and not pertaining strictly to savage life. The names of such articles invariably express their use, and very frequently the motions made in using them. This peculiarity also appears in their proper names, which are generally descriptive of some personal singularity. But the sign language used by the Indian is, after all, the greatest aid to conversation, and is very complete. Their pantomimical power seems to be perfect. There are no two tribes of Indians that use exactly the same oral language, but all are conversant with the same pantomimic code.

The costume of the Indian, when in the privacy of his own home, is somewhat limited in its nature. Like other thrifty persons, he is given to wearing his old clothes. That feathered vertebra, which is seen meandering down the exceedingly straight back of the Indian in the picture-books, is only used upon state occasions. Ordinarily he wears leg-

gins reaching a certain way up his legs, and a shirt extending a certain way down his trunk; taken together, and they are not unlike that garment so pleaded for by reformers in female dress. Sew the bottom of the shirt to the top of the leggins, and you have what? The chemiloon. Eureka! Ages ago the chemiloon dawned upon the mind of the untutored Indian; but inventions are of slow growth. It took three hundred years to develop the sofa from the three-legged stool: so with the garment of the red-man; and it is still in process of evolution. The moccasin-top, protecting the ankle, was perhaps the Bathybius from which the aboriginal chemiloon was evolved. Gradually it crept up the leg and assumed the shape of the leggin. Down to meet it from the neck, evolved from a wampum collar, came the shirt, slowly extending downward until it now almost meets the leggin. What will be the wild joy in the red-man's tent, when, years hence, the ends of the two garments shall meet, and the perfect chemiloon be formed! Until then he enters a caveat against any infringement of his patent; for the invention belongs to the Indian.



INDIAN COSTUME.

By some seeming incongruity the winter camp is nearly

always called a Mission—an appellation warranted, perhaps, by the invariable presence there of a priest, either temporarily or permanently. This personage is the spiritual guide, philosopher and friend, of a very disreputable flock, and his duties, if conscientiously performed, are of a very arduous nature. And it is seldom that they are not conscientiously performed; for no man can labor more disinterestedly for the good of his fellow than the missionary priest. It is a startling contrast to find in these rude camps men of refined culture, and the highest mental excellence, devoting themselves to the task of civilizing the denizens of the forest and plain—sacrificing all the comforts and advantages of their better lives to the advancement of a barbarian brother, whose final elevation to the ranks of civilized men they can never hope to see. And yet they are to be found everywhere throughout the lone places of the North, dwelling in the midst of wild and savage peoples, whom they attend with a strange and paternal devotion. On the banks of lonely lakes they minister to the wants and needs of the wild men who repair thither periodically to fish; in the huge camps of our barbarian brethren on the limitless plains; at the isolated trading-posts scattered over the Fur Land; and, seeking them in their lonely huts or squalid lodges, one ever finds the same simple surroundings, the same evidences of a faith that seems more than human.

Prominent among the rude landmarks of the winter camp is the store of the free-trader. Of more pretentious exterior, and of larger proportions than the dwellings of the hunters,

it is easily discerned at a glance. As a rule, its owner is developed from the ordinary plain-hunter. Antoine, or Pascal, or Baptiste, having followed the chase for years, and proving a more successful hunter than his fellows, accumulates a fair supply of robes and ponies. On some springtime visit to the settlements, the fur-trader with whom he has dealt for years, noticing his thrift and success, offers to outfit him with goods on condition of receiving the first offer of the furs for which they are exchanged. Pascal is delighted with the prospect of becoming a free-trader, and pays down a small sum in cash and furs, and receives a considerable amount of ammunition and finery on credit. With this he starts for the plains, and at some eligible point near a water-course, and in advantageous proximity to both buffalo grounds and forest, in order to attract a trade in both classes of fur, locates his trading-store. Around this nucleus gather the nomadic plain-hunters and Indians, and lastly the priest; for Pascal may be said to be the founder of the winter camp. The size of his store is regulated by the amount of his stock, but likely in any event to be the most pretentious in the camp. It may have two apartments, but more likely one. The goods are kept in boxes and bales, and produced only as required. Pascal has yet to learn the art of attracting custom by the display of his wares. In truth, there is but little need for him to do so; for, if the improvident Indian or half-breed should by some fortuitous circumstance become possessed of a surplus of salable provision or fur, its ownership becomes a consuming flame to him until disposed of. So

Pascal's stock of merchandise decreases rapidly as the winter advances, and his store of robes and furs increases in proportion. Most of the latter are purchased cheaply, and for an equivalent of gilt and color, as it were; for the tastes of his customers are of a very decided sort, like those of other mixed races.

If Pascal trades merchandise alone, his life flows uneventfully along, and he may enjoy counting his store of peltries as they increase day by day. He is looked up to by his fellows as a kind of Delphic oracle upon all disputed points, on account of his superior wealth and standing. His vanity is flattered by such adulation, and he assumes an air of vast importance as the head man of the camp. He becomes the arbiter in all petty disputes, the umpire at horse-races, and general referee in knotty and vexatious games of *grand-major*, poker, and the moccasin-game. His authority is second to none save the priest, who, as the spiritual head of the camp, assumes the first place by right of eminent fitness and propriety. If Pascal trades liquor, however, his lines are not cast in pleasant places, notwithstanding the heavy profits upon the barter. Every day turmoil reigns in the camp, and sounds of revelry fill the midnight air. His otherwise quiet store becomes the rendezvous of a cursing, clamoring, gesticulating assemblage of men. There the betting and drinking of the afternoon are succeeded by the deeper drinking and gambling of the evening; and the sound of shuffling cards, the clinking of the buttons and bullets of the moccasin-game, and the exclamations of triumph and despair of winner and

loser are heard at all times. Rum flows freely; for the plain-hunter carries to the trading-store every peltry he can obtain. Under these circumstances the free-trader becomes a curse to his brethren, and his store a plague-spot upon the plains.

Toward the middle of April Pascal begins to pack up his furs, collect his outstanding debts, and make preparations for a return to the settlements with the proceeds of the year's trade. His ponies are brought in from the prairie where they have wintered out; the fractured wooden carts are bound up with raw-hide lines; the broken-spirited ponies coaxed into a semblance of life and vigor; the dusky progeny packed in with bales and blankets, the hut locked up, and he sets forth for the lonely oasis of civilization nearer the border. On the main prairie trails he joins the trains of other traders, who have left their winter stations at the same time. Constantly augmented by new additions, and following each other in single file, the long line seems at length interminable; and by the time the border settlements are reached, often varies from two to three miles in length. Their long winding columns sparkle with life and gayety; cart-tilts of every hue flash brightly in the sun; hosts of wolfish dogs run in and out among the vehicles, and troops of loose horses gallop alongside. The smartly-dressed men ride their showiest steeds, their wives and daughters traveling in the carts, enthroned on packs of fur. The traders wear their picturesque summer dress—brass-buttoned dark-blue capotes, with moleskin or corduroy trousers and calico shirts. Wide-awake

hats, or cloth caps with peaks, are the favorite head-covering Gayly embroidered saddle-cloths and variegated sashes are preferred to those of less showy appearance; red, white and blue beading on black ground is common.

Reaching the settlements, the free-trader ascertains the current price of peltries, then repairs to his outfitter and offers him his stock at the highest market rates. To protect himself, the merchant generally accepts; for, if Pascal sells elsewhere, and obtains the money for his peltries, the chances are that he forgets his obligation, and returns to the plains without liquidating his debt. Having sold his furs, however, the half-breed trader next proceeds to clothe himself and his family in all the gaudy finery that money can purchase, and then, procuring an ample supply of rum, gives a party to his friends. In this manner, and by the dissipations induced by a prolonged sojourn in the settlements, he manages to squander the greater portion of the season's earnings, and finds himself, when ready to return to the plains, as poor as he was the year before. Then he returns to the trader, who has anticipated just such a consummation of things, and obtaining credit for a new outfit, finally departs.

But it is a month or more before the last half-breed trader in tasseled cap, sky-blue capote, brilliant sash and corduroy trousers, has had his last dram in the border grog-shops, and carries his fevered brow off toward the setting sun; a month before the last cart-train, with its following of mongrel dogs, unkempt ponies, lowing kine and tawny human beings, has disappeared beyond the horizon. Very brilliant and pictur-

esque they were while they stayed about the settlements. Their brown and smoke-discolored leather tents dotted the prairie for weeks; there was always a scurrying of horses and a barking of dogs in the neighborhood; a continual feasting and drinking; a reckless riding to and fro, and the jargon of voices vociferating and shouting in half-a-dozen languages. Pierre and Antoine ran a mad race through the streets of the town; dusky Darby and tawny Joan made love upon the open plain in anything but the conventional manner; Gabriel drank deep of the white man's fire-water, and fell prone in the gutter, but, raised to his pony's back, went off at a wild gallop, to the astonishment of every one, as if he were part and parcel of that unkempt animal; Philomel, appareled in scarlet cloth and bewildering beadwork, like the little savage peri that she was, danced down the still hours in the short grass of the prairie, to the music of some long-haired and moccasined Paganini. Dark but comely was Philomel; her full rounded figure, black hair, bewitching eyes and little affectations, were enough to soften the soul of an anchorite. Like Mr. Locker's heroine, she was—

> "An angel in a frock,
> With a fascinating cock
> To her nose."

Her little moccasined feet will accompany the quick thud of hunter heel, as Louison or Baptiste dance unceasingly upon the half-hewn floor of some winter hut, in the glow of firelight through parchment windows, and to the sound of fiddle scraped by rough hunter hand.

It occasionally occurs that a pure Indian turns trader, and when he does so he is likely to be a more provident and successful trader than his half-breed brother. I recollect one Pegowis, a Cree, who amassed considerable wealth in this way. He was a saturnine old red man, small of stature and very dark even for an Indian. Of a quiet, grave and reticent nature, yet shrewd, cunning and avaricious, he would have made, had he been white and had proper advantages, a most pronounced type of the successful gambler. He had every trait of that well-known steamboat character, and loved the hazard of a die to an equal degree. In fact, he was a notorious gambler, and as notoriously a successful one. He took the chances on almost everything. He would sit down with an untutored Indian fresh from the primeval wilderness, and with the fascinations of the moccasin game lure him on to certain poverty. He would inveigle a card-loving half-breed into a game of grand major, and strip him of his last earthly possession. He would race his horses against any animal that ran on four legs, and invariably came off the winner. Of his propensity for this latter amusement I recall an amusing instance:

Pegowis, on some of his visits to the military posts along the Missouri, had picked up a bay horse of more than ordinary speed and endurance. He christened him "The arrow that flies out of the big gun," which is short for cannon ball; a name derived from the fact of the horse having a large lump on his fore knee, resembling one of those projectiles. In addition to this defect, the joint of the same limb, from the knee down, went off at an angle of forty-five degrees from the re-

mainder of the leg, and appeared, in fact, to bear no sort of relevance to the animal at all. He limped very perceptibly, and altogether ambled along in that fashion described by the nautical phrase "a rolling gait." Yet the wily Pegowis cared for the animal as for the apple of his eye, and taking him home reduced the whole prairie country to insolvency with him during the winter. In the spring he brought Cannon-ball into the settlement, harnessed to a very shaky old cart, and drawing a load of furs, and employed a wideawake half-breed, who spoke English fluently, as a sort of "roper-in" to effect a horse-race. Driving the disreputable looking beast up before the door of a trading-shop, the half-breed patted and caressed the animal, and bade his helper take every care of him; for, remarked Pegowis's emissary, in the hearing of his victims, "That 'ere horse is a racer." A young Canadian, with a fancy for horse flesh, thinking he had an easy victim, immediately offered to race and was as promptly accepted by the half-breed. The wager was raised higher and higher, until it reached the formidable sum of one hundred pounds sterling, which the venerable Pegowis, who now opportunely appeared upon the scene, at once drew forth from the recesses of his red blanket. Cannon-ball was unharnessed from the cart, the ground measured off, and, mounted by a young Cree, the old horse came in an easy winner, the saturnine Pegowis pocketing the money without a smile to disturb the placidity of his muddy countenance. This veteran trader still continues the business, and unless overtaken by reverses, or estopped by the bullet

of some cheated red brother, will probably become a very rich man.

From time to time, as the winter camp runs short of provisions, expeditions are made to the buffalo grounds to obtain a fresh supply. The herds, which wander far to the southward in the fall, strange to say, return in the winter and collect in great numbers in the broken country between the two Saskatchewans, finding shelter in the timber, and browsing upon the willows, or coarse grass, still uncovered by snow.

The half-breeds generally go to the winter hunts in small parties, and with horse or dog-sledges to haul home the robes. The journey thither occupies a week or ten days, as the herds are near or far out. Proximity to the buffalo grounds is known by the radical change in the aspect of the country. Instead of an interminable plain, with an illimitable perspective of wrack and drift, the country becomes undulating, with scattered patches of small timber alternating with miniature meadows and grassy levels. Here the buffalo separate themselves into small bands, and often into twos and threes, and find abundant food beneath the light snows. But into this sylvan retreat come the hunters with their dog-trains. Carefully skirting its border, but not penetrating it needlessly to alarm the herds, they select their camping-place in the thickest of the timber, and thence make prolonged forays upon their shaggy game. Aside from the mere selection of the camping-ground, but little time is lost in rendering it comfortable; for on the winter hunt the main object is attended to with a singleness of purpose that would

delight the soul of a business martinet. But few fires are lighted during the day, for fear of frightening the game; so that the labor of making camp is limited to securing, out of reach of the dogs, not only the provisions—of which by this time there is likely to be but little left—but snowshoes, harness, and everything with any skin or leather about it. An Indian sledge-dog will devour almost anything of animal origin, and invariably eats his own harness and his master's snowshoes, if left within his reach.

Dividing into parties, the hunters pursue different directions, endeavoring, however, whenever practicable, to encircle a certain amount of territory, with the object of driving the quarry toward a common centre. Again, the small parties follow the same plan on a smaller scale, each one surrounding a miniature meadow, or grassy glade; so that, if the number of hunters is large, there are many small circles within the limits of the general circumference of the hunt.

The winter hunt for buffalo in the Fur Land is generally made by stalking the animals in the deep snow on snowshoes. To hunt the herds on horseback, as in summer, would be an impossibility; the snow hides the murderous badger-holes that cover the prairie surface, and to gallop weak horses on such ground would be certain disaster. By this method of hunting the stalker endeavors to approach within gunshot of his quarry by stealthily creeping upon them, taking advantage of every snow-drift, bush, or depression in the prairie, which will screen his person from view. And it is a more difficult feat to approach a band of buffalo than it would appear on

first thought. When feeding the herd is more or less scattered, but at sight of the hunter it rounds and closes into a tolerably compact circular mass. If the stalker attempts an open advance on foot—concealment being impossible from the nature of the ground—the buffalo always keep sheering off as soon as he gets within two hundred yards of the nearest. If he follows, they merely repeat the movement, and always manage to preserve the same distance. Although there is not the slightest danger in approaching a herd, it requires, in a novice, an extraordinary amount of nerve. When he gets within three hundred yards, the bulls on that side, with head erect, tail cocked in the air, nostrils expanded, and eyes that seem to flash fire, walk uneasily to and fro, menacing the intruder by pawing the earth and tossing their huge heads. The hunter still approaching, some bull will face him, lower his head, and start on a most furious charge. But alas for brute courage! When he has gone thirty yards he thinks better of it, stops, stares an instant, and then trots back to the herd. Another and another will try the same strategy, with the same result, and if, in spite of these ferocious demonstrations, the hunter still continues to advance, the whole herd will incontinently take to its heels.

By far the best method of stalking a herd in the snow is to cover oneself with a white blanket, or sheet, in the same manner as the Indians use the wolf-skin. In this way the animal cannot easily get the hunter's wind, and are prevented from distinguishing him amidst the surrounding snow. The buffalo being the most stupid and sluggish of Plain animals,

and endowed with the smallest possible amount of instinct, the little that he has seems adapted rather for getting him into difficulties than out of them. If not alarmed at sight or smell of the stalker, he will stand stupidly gazing at his companions in their death throes until the whole band is shot down.

When the hunter is skilled in the stalk, and the buffalo are plentiful, the wild character of the sport almost repays him for the hardships he endures. With comrades equally skillful he surrounds the little meadows into which he has stalked his quarry. Well posted, the hunter nearest the herd delivers his fire. In the sudden stupid halt and stare of the bewildered animals immediately following, he often gets in a second and third shot. Then comes the wild dash of the frightened herd toward the opening in the park, when the remaining hunters instantly appear, pouring in their fire at short range, and pretty certain of securing their game.

The cutting up follows; and the rapidity with which a skillful hunter completes the operation is little short of marvelous. When time permits, the full process is as follows: He begins by skinning the buffalo, then takes off the head, and removes the paunch and offal as far as the heart; next he cuts off the legs and shoulders and back. The chest, with the neck attached, now remains—a strange-looking object, that would scare a respectable larder into fits—and this he proceeds to lay beside the other joints, placing there also such internal parts as are considered good. Over the whole he then draws the skin, and having planted a stick in the ground close by, with a handkerchief or some such thing fastened to

it to keep off the wolves, the operation of cutting up is complete, and the animal is ready for conveyance to camp when the sledges arrive. The half-breed goes through this whole process with a large and very heavy knife, like a narrow and pointed cleaver, which is also used for cutting wood, and performing all the offices of a hatchet; but unwieldy as it is, a practiced hand can skin the smallest and most delicate creatures with it as easily as with a pocket-knife.

A few days' successful stalking generally supplies a party with sufficient meat, and, unless hunting for robes, they are not likely to linger long upon the bleak plains for the mere sake of sport. The winter stalk is emphatically a "pot-hunt," the term "sport" being scarcely pertinent to a chase involving so serious discomfort. A *cache* of the meat is accordingly made, from which supplies may be drawn as required. And this *cache* has to be made in a very substantial manner to resist the attacks of wolves, which invariably hang about the camp of the hunter. Generally speaking, it is made in the form of a pyramid, the ends of the logs being sunk slightly into the ground, against which a huge bank of snow is heaped. This, when well beaten down, and coated with ice by means of water poured over it, holds the timber firmly in position, and is perfectly impregnable to a whole army of wolves, though a wolverine will certainly break it open if he finds it.

At last comes the departure. The sledges are packed with melting rib, fat brisket, and luscious tongues; the cowering dogs are again rudely roused from their dream of that far-off day, which never comes for them, when the whip shall

be broken and hauling shall be no more. Amid fierce imprecation, the cracking of whips, deep-toned yells, and the grating of the sledges upon the frozen snow, the camp in the poplar thicket is left behind. The few embers of the deserted camp-fire glow cheerily for a while, then moulder slowly away. The wolves, growing bolder as the day wears on, steal warily in, and devour such refuse as the dogs have left. As night settles silently down, the snow begins to fall. It comes slowly, in a whirling mist of snowflakes that dazzles and confuses the eye. The ashes of the camp-fire, mingling with it, take on a lighter grey; the hard casing of the *cache* receives a fleecy covering. Feathery shafts of snow, shaken from the long tree-branches, fly like white-winged birds down over what has been the camp. But all traces of its use are hidden by the spotless mantle flung from above. The coming morning reveals only a pyramidal drift of snow among the aspens—around, a hopeless, uncharted, trackless sea of white.

Such is the winter stalk—a hunt that has often formed the theme of the traveler's story. And yet it may be doubted if there has ever been placed before the reader's vision anything like a true account of the overpowering sense of solitude, of dreary, endless space, of awful desolation, which at times fills the hunter's mind, as, peering from some swelling ridge or aspen thicket, he sees a lonely herd of buffalo, in long, scattered file, trailing across the snow-wrapt, interminable expanse into the shadows of the coming night.

Life to the white stranger temporarily resident in the winter camp becomes after a season pleasant enough. The study

of Indian and half-breed character and customs, the visits of his barbarian neighbors, the exciting incidents of his every-day life, all conspire to relieve the monotony which would otherwise hang over him like a pall. It is true that of life other than human there is a meagre supply; a magpie or screaming jay sometimes flaunts its gaudy plumage on the meat-stage; in the early morning a sharp-tailed grouse croaks in the fir or spruce-trees; and at dusk, when every other sound is hushed, the owl hoots its lonely cry. Besides human companionship, however, the white resident of the winter camp has many pleasures of a more æsthetic character. It is pleasant at night, when returning from a long jaunt on snowshoes or dog-sledge, to reach the crest of the nearest ridge and see, lying below one, the straggling camp, the red glow of the fire-light gleaming through the parchment windows of the huts, the bright sparks flying upward amid the sombre pine-tops, and to feel that, however rude it may be, yet there in all that vast wilderness is the one place he may call home. Nor is it less pleasant when, as the night wears on, the long letter is penned, the familiar book read, while the log fire burns brightly and the dogs sleep quietly stretched before it. Many a night thus spent is spread out in those pictures which memory weaves in after life, each pleasure distinct and real, each privation blended with softened colors.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FROST KING.

THE old maps, based upon the discoveries of Cabot and Castier, which represented the centre of America as a vast inland sea, erred only in the description of the ocean which they placed in the central continent. The ocean is there; but it is one of grass and waves of sand, and its shores are the crests of mountain ranges and dark pine-forests. The eye travels over it to the farthest distance without one effort of vision, and reaching there, rests unfatigued by its long gaze. No jagged peaks break the monotony of sky-line; no river lays its silvery folds along the middle distance; no dark forests give shade to foreground, or fringe the perspective; no speck of life, no trace of man, nothing but wilderness. Stripped of its drapery, space stands forth with almost terrible distinctness.

The salt sea does not present a more infinite variety of aspect than does this prairie-ocean. In early summer, a vast expanse of waving grass and pale pink roses; in autumn, too often a wild sea of raging fire; in winter a dazzling surface of purest snow, heaped into rolling ridges or frost-crested waves. The phosphorescent waters of the Ægean cannot show more gorgeous sunsets; no solitude of mid-ocean can

vie with the loneliness of a night-shadowed prairie. The stillness can be felt, the silence heard. The wail of the prowling wolf makes the voice of solitude audible; the stars look down through infinite silence upon a silence almost as intense. This ocean has no past; treeless, desolate, and storm-swept was it when the stone of the Sphinx was yet unhewn, and the site of Nineveh was a river-meadow, and it is the same to-day. Time has been nought to it; and the races of men have come and gone, leaving behind them no trace, no vestige of their presence. It is an unending vision of sky and grass, and dim, distant, and ever-shifting horizon. "The seasons come and go, grass grows and flowers die, the fire leaps with tiger bounds along the earth, the snow lies still and quiet over hill and lake, the rivers rise and fall, but the rigid features of the wilderness rest unchanged. Lonely, silent, and impassive; heedless of man, season, or time, the weight of the Infinite seems to brood over it." *

To the unaccustomed voyager upon the great prairies of the Fur Land they bear no landmark. As well might he be left alone upon an uncharted sea. There are spaces where no tree or bush breaks the long monotony of sky-line, and he gets "out of sight of land." Standing in the middle of the plain, it presents the appearance of an immense sheet slightly raised at both ends; for the level prairie has the peculiarity of seemingly being elevated in whatever point of the compass one may turn, leaving the observer always in the depression. So clear is the atmosphere that the natural range of vision is

* Major Butler, "Wild North Land."

greatly extended, and distant objects may be clearly and easily seen; which, anywhere else, it would be impossible to distinguish or define. It is almost like looking through a telescope. As a result, one finds it difficult to ascertain the relative distances of objects, and in consequence, to estimate their size. One makes the blunder of mistaking a buffalo for a crow, or, more frequently, a crow for a buffalo. If anyone be inclined to laugh at this, let him stand upon the sea-shore with a sailor, and compare their estimate of distance with his, and mark the difference. The eye ranges over a sea of short waving grass, without a single intervening object to afford the accustomed means of estimating relative size and distance.

Left to himself, the inexperienced traveler finds it impossible to pursue a straight course, and invariably begins to describe a circle by bearing continually to the left—a weakness incomprehensible to the plain-dweller, who looks upon it as the most arrant stupidity. Unless he be an expert in the use of a compass, the possession of an instrument is likely to prove of little avail. If he take the sun for a guide, he will find no theory quite so fallacious for an unskilled voyager; for, let him be as careful as he will, he can keep the sun in the position he requires, and yet go round in a circle. After one becomes accustomed to prairie or ocean-travel, he learns almost intuitively to be guided by the sun, and can travel by it; but it cannot be learned by a neophyte in a single lesson.

Alone upon the illimitable plain, passing by, in his ignorance of prairie-craft, those numberless milestones to safety

which make to the plain-dweller a great public highway, the lonely wanderer begins at length to realize that he is lost. It dawns upon him first in a sense of absolute bewilderment —a bewilderment so intense as to produce for the moment an almost perfect blank in the mind. He is incapable of summoning thought sufficient to realize anything—to consider his present situation, or take measures for future action. It is an indefinable state where all is chaotic; quickly succeeded, however, by an all-pervading terror, which chains thought and action in a manner nearly akin to death—a vague, shapeless terror, imagining all possible horrible things, and painting mistily and hazily upon the numbed faculties nameless miseries yet to be experienced: a slow death by starvation or thirst; exposure to the devouring elements, or wild beasts; tortures of every imaginable description, always ending in a lingering death; and, above all, never more to look upon a human face, never more to share human sympathy—a going out in utter darkness, perfectly alone. Then Despair joins Terror, adding her tortures; and lastly comes that all-powerful, all-pervading desire for human companionship which, blending with the former feelings, unhinges the intellect and renders the man insane.

In winter the dangers of the prairie-ocean deepen and become manifold. The deep snows obliterate all landmarks; to-day, the depressions are filled up; the ridges levelled; it is a dead surface of glistening white. To-morrow, the shifting winds start the breakers going; they come at first in long even swells, the harbingers of the storm; they break

into short chopping waves; they pile one upon another in tumultuous billows that freeze into motionless torpor. The face of the snowy sea is never the same; what is a landmark to-day is obliterated to-morrow. The peaceful summer scene that seemed only wanting the settler's hut, the yoke of oxen, the wagon, to become the paradise of the husbandman, is lost in fierce storm and tempest and blinding snowdrift.

But there come calms upon the prairie-ocean—days when an infinite silence broods over the trackless expanse, when the Mirage of the Desert plays strange freaks of inverted shore-land. It is the moment following the sunrise of such a day. A deeper stillness steals over the earth, and in its solemn hush colors of wondrous hue rise and spread along the horizon. The earth stands inverted in the sky; the capes and promontories of the prairie-ocean are etched in deeper lines than graver ever drew upon the blue above; the poplar and aspen islands which dot the plain, float bottom upwards, anchored by great golden threads in a deep sea of emerald and orange and blue, mingled and interwoven together. Dwellings twenty and thirty miles distant, seem but a few rods away; the gliding dog-sledges, out of sight over the plain, are transferred to the sky, and seem steering their sinuous courses through the clear ether; far away, seemingly beyond and above all, one broad flash of crimson light, the sun's first gift, reddens upward toward the zenith. But every moment brings a change; the day gathers closer to the earth, and wraps its impassive veil again over the sunken soul of the wilderness.

The mirages of the Plains are of wondrous beauty; every

feature of the landscape seems limned with supernatural distinctness. We have seen, a moment after sunrise on a winter's morn, a little hamlet, thirty miles away, defined against the sky with a minuteness of detail not excelled by a steel engraving. We have seen men at nearly the same distance photographed so microscopically as to be able to describe their wearing apparel; have distinguished the gambolings of dogs and other animals upon the snow. The ordinary phenomena of the mirage—the simple drawing of a distant landscape near the spectator—are of almost daily occurrence at some seasons of the year. Objects far beyond the range of the naked eye seem but a few rods distant; beautiful, waveless, nameless lakes glimmer in uncertain shore-line, and in shadow of inverted hill-top; the aspen groves seem standing with their trunks half buried in the water. At times, when the atmospheric conditions are perfect, the whole landscape within the range of vision seems but an optical delusion, a phantasmagoria; everything about one is uncertain, unreal. The mirage begins but a few yards distant from one, and shifts and merges into new forms, like the changing colors of a kaleidoscope. At such times the inexperienced traveler is all at sea; he pursues one *ignis fatuus* but to involve himself in another, and becomes hopelessly and irretrievably lost.

To the plain-dweller, however, all the myriad features of the prairie are but so many guideboards pointing out his destination. He who runs may read. He has the sun by day, the moon and the stars by night. The turning of a blade of grass points him east and west; the bark of every tree north

and south; the birds of the air forecast the weather for him. He sees a twig broken, and it tells the story of a passing animal; an upturned pebble on the beach marks the hour when the animal drank. He will distinguish the trail of a wagon over the prairie years after it has passed; the grass, he says, never grows the same. There is not a sigh or sough of the restless wind that is unintelligible to him. He will take a straight course in one direction over the plain, where no landmarks can be seen, in days when the sun is not shining, nor a breath of air stirring. Yet he is unable to explain the power he possesses, and considers it quite a natural faculty. The half-breed or Indian never gets lost. If he be overtaken by storm upon the plain, his escape becomes simply a question of physical endurance.

But the measureless spaces of the Fur Land have other dangers and discomforts than those of uncharted immensity. To any one who has not experienced the atmosphere of that hyperborean region the intensity of its coldness can scarcely be described. The sun, being so far southward, creates but little heat, and the major part of the time is hidden behind sombre and leaden clouds. Before you, in every direction, the eye meets an unbroken waste of snow. Far away, perhaps, as the eye can reach, a faint line of scattered tree-tops may barely be distinguished, appearing no higher than fern-bushes, marking the course of some prairie-stream crossing your path, or running parallel with it—not a thing of life or motion within the range of vision between the earth and sky, save the conveyance near you. The vastness and mag-

nitude of the scene are overpowering. The immensity of the dead level is overwhelming. You are an atom in the gigantic panorama of frozen Nature about you.

Coming in from the rarefied atmosphere generated by sixty-seven degrees of frost, an extended and sentient forefinger, pointing in the direction of one's nose, instantly informs him of the frozen condition of that member. Then he recalls the fact that, fifteen minutes before, a slight pricking sensation was experienced in the end of the nose—momentary, and in the hurry of the instant scarcely noticed. It was at that particular moment that it had frozen. Had he looked out, or rather down, he would have seen the ghostly spectacle; for firmer, colder, whiter, and harder than hard hearts, stony eyes, marble foreheads, or any other silicious similitude, stands forth prominently a frozen nose.

Some theorist might make a study of frozen noses which would be interesting. Inference might be connected with inference in infinite duration. One might read an essay from it on the eternal fitness of things, and history viewed by the light of frozen noses might reveal new secrets. For example, the inability of the Roman nose to stand the rigors of an Arctic winter limits the boundaries of the Roman empire; the Esquimaux nose is admirably fitted by nature, on account of its limited extent, for the climate in which it breathes, hence its assignment to hyperborean latitudes. This, however, is by the way.

One's nose was frozen, say, in traversing at a rapid walk a distance of not more than one hundred yards; for it is

a "poudre" day. Sixty-seven degrees of frost, unaccompanied by wind, is endurable if you are taking vigorous exercise, and are warmly dressed; but let the faintest possible wind arise—a gentle zephyr, a thing which just turns the smoke above the lodge-poles, or twists the feather detached from the wing of a passing bird—then look out, for the chances are that every person met will extend that forefinger to mark some frozen spot on your reddish-blue countenance. This, however, is the extent of the courtesy; they do not follow out the Russian plan of rubbing out the plague-spot with a handful of snow, probably out of deference to the limited amount of attrition most noses stand without peeling.

A poudre day, with the temperature in the thirties below, is a thing to be spoken of in a whisper. Not a soul leaves the fireside who can avoid it; to wander away from well-known landmarks is to run the risk of never returning. Every winter half a score of men walk off into the whirling particles of snow and drift, and the morning sun finds a calm and peaceful face turned up to the sky, with its life frozen out, and its form hard and unimpressible, as if carved from granite. The early morning of such a day may be clear and still; but upon close inspection the atmosphere will be found filled with crystal, scintillating, minute, almost imperceptible particles of snow, drifting on wings of air, impalpable and fleeting. Soon after daybreak the wind begins to rise. Off to the north rolls a little eddy of snow, a mere puff, not larger than one's hand. Another follows; miniature coils circle over the smooth surface of the snow, and sink back imperceptibly to the level again. Drifts of larger

proportions roll over the expanse, until the atmosphere becomes thick with the frozen particles. All landmarks are lost, and the range of vision is limited to a few feet. The wind howls like a raging beast, and the merciless cold congeals the very heart's blood. It is the sirocco of the North!

On such days traveling is particularly toilsome and dangerous. The state of the atmosphere renders respiration difficult, increasing the action of the heart, and producing a slight but constant dizziness. All landmarks are obliterated, and unless one is thoroughly conversant with the country, he is liable to lose his way, and be caught at nightfall without shelter or fire. But the most dangerous phase of travel is the tendency toward inertia. Fatigued by the least effort, paralyzed by the cold, perhaps frostbitten in many places, despite every precaution, the traveler is likely to give up in despair. "I cannot" and "I will not" become synonymous terms. All effort is apparently useless; the attention is distracted by the necessity of fighting continually to keep face and hands free from frostbite; keeping the road in so blinding a tempest seems to be impossible; the animals one is driving face about in harness, and refuse to proceed; and so, beset on every hand, with an intellect benumbed and paralyzed by the intense cold, and a body overcome by physical inertia, one gives up all effort as only adding unnecessary pain, and sits down to be bound hand and foot by the final stupor. Five minutes' rest in some snowdrift on the plain is enough, in certain conditions of fatigue and temperature, to paralyze the energies of the

strongest man, and make him welcome any fate if only let alone to take his ease. We recall more than one time when we would have given all we possessed simply to have been permitted to lie down in a snowbank for ten minutes; and left to ourselves, we should certainly have done so. Some of the best dog-drivers on the plains have related to us similar experiences, where the inertia of a poudre day on the prairie seemed too intense to be resisted. Persons who know the prairie only in summer or autumn have but little notion of its winter fierceness and desolation. To get a true conception of life in these solitudes they must go toward the close of November into the treeless waste; there, amid wreck and tempest and biting cold, and snowdrifts so dense that earth and heaven seem wrapped together in undistinguishable chaos, they will see a sight as different from their summer ideal as day is from night.

But, though not so dangerous, the still days are the coldest. There are every winter a dozen or more days so magically still that all the usual sounds of nature seem to be suspended; when the ice cracks miles away with a report like that of a cannon; when the breaking of a twig reaches one like the falling of a tree; when one's own footsteps, clad in soft moccasins, come back from the yielding snow like the crunching of an iron heel through gravel; when every artificial sound is exaggerated a hundred fold, and Nature seems to start at every break in the intense silence. The atmosphere is as clear as crystal, and the range of vision seems to be unlimited. Seen from a window, from the cosy limits

of an almost hermetically-sealed room, the clear sunshine and crisp freshness of the day appear to invite one forth to enjoy its seeming mildness. But the native knows better than to venture out. A fifteen minutes' walk in that clear ether is a fifteen minutes' fight for existence. A sudden prick and one's nose is frozen; next go both cheeks; one raises his hand to rub away the ghastly white spots, only to add his fingers to the list of icy members. Rub as you will, run hard, swing your arms—all to no purpose; the little white spots increase in size, until the whole face is covered with the waxen leprosy. The breath congeals almost upon leaving the mouth, and the icy vapor falls instead of rising. Expectorate, and instantly there is a lump of ice where the spittle fell. Ah, it is cold beyond belief. The spirit registers a temperature away down in the forties. We have seen a stalwart man, after a few hours' exposure on such a day, walk into the room where every footfall clanked upon the floor like blocks of wood clapping together; his feet frozen solid as lumps of ice.

On such a day one may stand for hours in the snow with moccasined feet, and leave no trace of moisture behind. The snow is granulated like sand; there is no adhesiveness in it. It is as difficult to draw a sledge through it as through a bed of sand. Slipperiness has gone out of it. A horse gives out in a few minutes. And yet the aspect of all nature is calm, still, and equable as on a May day.

One of these still nights upon the prairie is unspeakably awful. The cold is measured by degrees as much below the

freezing point as ordinary summer temperature is above it. Scraping away the snow, the blankets and robes are spread down. Then you dress for bed. Your heaviest coat is donned, and the hood carefully pulled up over the heavy fur cap upon your head; the largest moccasins and thickest socks are drawn on (common leather boots would freeze one's feet in a twinkling); huge leather mittens, extending to the elbows, and trebly lined, come next; you lie down and draw all the available robes and blankets about you. Then begins the cold. The frost comes out of the clear grey sky with still, silent rigor. The spirit in the thermometer placed by your head sinks down into the thirties and forties below zero. Just when the dawn begins to break in the east it will not infrequently be at fifty. You are tired, perhaps, and sleep comes by the mere force of fatigue. But never from your waking brain goes the consciousness of cold. You lie with tightly-folded arms and upgathered knees, and shiver beneath all your coverings, until forced to rise and seek safety by the fire. If you are a novice and have no fire, count your beads and say your prayers, for your sleep will be long.

This low temperature, however, is vastly preferable to, and more enjoyable than the shifting climate of the lake regions. One always knows just what to expect, and prepares accordingly; and we doubt whether the feeling of being cold all through is not experienced on the levee at New Orleans as intensely as in the North. The air is crisp and entirely free from moisture, and there is an utter absence of that penetrating, marrow-chilling quality which makes winter life further south

a burden. No sudden changes pile cold upon cold, and keep one's lungs in a continual congestion. The climate, while cold, is equable. From November till April one knows that he can never go out without abundant wrappings. Just what constitutes an abundance varies considerably in amount. The native attires himself in a pair of corduroy trousers, a calico shirt, an unlined coat, very much open at the breast to show the figured shirt, a fur cap, moccasins, and a pair of duffel socks without legs. Thus appareled, he is ready to face all day the roughest weather of the winter. But then he is continually in motion, and possessed of an unimpaired circulation. The foreigner, not to go into the minutiæ of his wardrobe, simply puts on all the clothing he can conveniently walk in, then closely watches the end of his nose. As for the aboriginal occupants of the country, little Indians may be seen any day running about in the snow before the lodge-doors, with the thermometer thirty degrees below zero, clad only in their own tawny integuments.

The effect of the interminable winter landscapes of the Fur Land upon the mind of the new-comer is melancholy in the extreme; more especially upon the still days, and where an occasional dwelling or tent is embraced in the desolate scene. No wind breaks the silence, or shakes the lumps of snow off the aspens or willows; and nothing is heard save the occasional cracking of the trees, as the severe frost acts upon the branches. The dwelling, if any, stands in a little hollow, where the willows and poplars are luxuriant enough to afford a shelter from the north wind. Just in front a small

path leads to the river, of which an extended view is had through the opening, showing the fantastic outlines of huge blocks and mounds of ice relieved against the white snow. A huge chasm, partially filled with fallen trees and mounds of snow, yawns on the left of the house; and the ruddy sparks of fire which issue from its chimney-top throw this and the surrounding forest in deeper gloom. All around lies the unending plain, wrapped in funeral cerements of ghastly white, or dotted here and there with slender trees, which seem to bend and shiver as they stand with their feet in the snow.

With the advent of a "blizzard," however, all still life ends and chaos begins. A blizzard is the white squall of the prairies, the simoon of the plains. Like its brother of the Sahara, when it comes all animate nature bows before it. The traveler prostrates himself in the snow, if he is of the initiated, and, covering his head, waits until it passes by. To pursue a different course, and journey on is to be lost. Let me give you an instance which may serve to illustrate its power, and the dangers of travel in the Fur Land:

In the month of February, 1869, I was called by urgent business from my residence near the foot of Lake Winnipeg to an interior post, distant some two hundred and fifty miles. This call involved no ordinary journey. It meant a weary, exhaustive travel of ten or twelve days across an unbroken prairie, without shelter of any kind, without the probability of encountering a single human being throughout the entire route, and the almost certainty of being overtaken by some of

the terrible storms prevalent at that season. But the call was imperative, and I set about preparing for the journey.

The preparations were of a primitive sort, there being but two methods of travel admissible at that season—the one by dog-sledges, the other with horses attached to light carioles. The outfit embraced a combination of the two by the selection of a commodious dog-sledge, with trams in which to place a horse for myself, and a light cariole for my companion; for attendant I must have over that desolate route. Choosing a stalwart half-breed, accustomed to the rough life of the prairies, and inured to all manner of hardship from infancy, we started one bitterly cold day toward the end of the month.

In the forward conveyance was placed provisions for ourselves and provender for the animals, while my own sledge was comfortably furnished with the huge bundle of robes and blankets requisite for our comfort and even safety in camp. Into this shoe-like sledge I fondly hoped to creep and glide smoothly to my journey's end. But the intensity of the cold soon disenchanted me of that illusion; for we had proceeded but a few miles when I was forced to take to my feet and run after the sledge to avoid being frozen. Even then the severity of the cold was such that, when jumping on the sledge for a momentary respite, on reaching the ground again my blood would seem frozen, the muscles refuse to act, and it would require a sharp trot of a mile or more before I could recover usual warmth.

Our rate of travel was about twenty-five miles a day. The route pursued was that commonly taken by the *voyageurs*

in their summer trips, and in many of our proposed camping-places the fuel had been exhausted to supply the numberless trains which had come and gone in the years before. This necessitated, at times, continued travel for an entire day without stopping.

At night, we descended the banks of the river, pitching our camp upon the second terrace, in some spot equally convenient to wood and water. Then, making an excavation in the snow, logs would be heaped up, until our fire was sufficiently large to afford a genial warmth throughout the night. Our sledges turned across the head, and blankets spread upon the snow, formed a bed into which, with caps and overcoats on, we were at all times ready to creep.

Thus we journeyed on, until the closing of the seventh day brought us to the crossing of Elm River, a small stream upon our route.

The day had been warmer than any experienced since starting. In the afternoon the snow had melted sufficiently to wet our moccasins thoroughly, and by its softness to impede our travel; so that the distance made had not been so great as on other days, while the fatigue and discomfort had been greater. During the day we had fallen in with a Mr. Wheeler, a gentleman from Montana, with whom I had been previously acquainted; a man of huge and burly *physique*, capable of immense endurance. He was journeying in our direction, having come up on the mail-sled the day before, and gladly availed himself of an invitation to encamp with us for the night. It being nearly dark on our arrival at the

river, we did not think it necessary to build a fire, both on account of the warmth of the evening, and the quality of the fuel, of which we were unable to find any except wet, green elm, hardly ignitable. So, having eaten a cold supper, we set about our preparations for the night.

Elm River, like all prairie-streams, is narrow and runs in a channel much below the surface of the plain, having, in consequence, high banks, which in most cases are precipitous but on this stream sloped back, with only moderate abruptness, to the level prairie. It was on the farther bank that we selected our place of rest for the night, without shelter, of course, but sufficiently below the level to be out of the sweep of the wind, as we thought. The half-breed and myself had for bedding four large buffalo-robes and four blankets; and our custom was to spread one robe and a blanket under us, and use the remainder as covering. The amount under was sufficient, owing to the snow preventing the cold reaching us from the earth, and rather increasing the amount of heat than otherwise. Mr. Wheeler had two robes and two blankets. We lay with our feet toward the stream, Mr. Wheeler placing himself immediately across the head of our bed—if so I may call it—wrapped in his own bedding.

I am thus minute in the description of our positions and bedding, in order to more thoroughly impress the reader with the intensity of the storm which followed.

It was about six o'clock in the evening when, after taking off our wet shoes, we retired, with overcoats and caps on, as customary. The sky at that time exhibited no extraordi-

nary appearance, and the temperature, if any thing, indicated snow. Being fatigued with the labors of the day, I was soon asleep, and did not awaken until about half-past nine o'clock, when I was aroused by the tossings of Mr. Wheeler in his efforts to adjust his bedding more comfortably. I observed that it had grown colder, and that a sharp wind had sprung up, which seemed to come down the channel of the stream instead of across it, as we had anticipated in the selection of a camp. However, having the guide on the windward side, I thought but little of it, and was soon asleep.

I awoke again, as near as I can judge, in about an hour and a half; this time from a general sensation of cold which enveloped me. I found both my companions awake, on speaking to them, and that Mr. Wheeler had been unable to sleep at all, owing to the cold, as he lay with his head to the wind, and could not prevent it from entering under the covering. It was blowing a perfect gale, and the air was so filled with whirling particles of snow that we could not distinguish our animals at the distance of a few yards. From that time forward it was impossible to sleep. We did every thing we could devise to ward off the cold, and the half-breed seemed especially anxious that I should not suffer; covered me with care, and shielded me as much as possible with his own person. But the chill seemed to have taken complete possession of me. I could not restrain my desire to shake and shiver, although knowing that it augmented the difficulty. For a time we conversed on the severity of the storm, and our error in not having built a fire, but gradually relapsed into silence; each

one, evidently, engaged in endeavoring to protect himself, or moodily brooding over his own sufferings.

Real physical suffering it had now become. The skin on my arms and limbs felt quite cold to the touch, and my bones grew heavy and chill as bars of iron. Yet, I had no fear, or thought even, of freezing to death. On that point I simply expected to shiver until morning would give us light sufficient to build a fire. The mind, however, was unnaturally acute. Thought on every subject was very vivid and distinct. I remember to have received a better insight of several subjects which occurred to me than at any previous time, and was able to think more rapidly. This was, I suppose, owing to the increased and enforced vitality necessary to sustain life, and to the stimulated condition of the brain under the suffering arising from the cold. Every thing was clear and distinct. I thought over the business I was upon, and studied the minutest details of it, all with remarkable rapidity. Occasionally my companion spoke to me, or touched me gently with his arm, but neither served to break up the general current of thought.

All through this outer surface of thought, however, there ran an undertow of suffering. I was conscious of growing colder; my limbs, especially, felt more chill and heavy. I began also to experience a peculiar sensation, as if the flesh, for the depth of a quarter or half an inch, was frozen solid, and the congealment gradually extending to the bone. The bone itself at times felt like a red-hot bar. I noticed, further, an increased labor in the beating of the heart, and could

distinguish the pulsations quite easily. At every throb I could feel the blood seemingly strike the end of the veins and arteries in the extremities. This after a time produced a slight dizziness in the head and a laborious respiration. As time went on, the sensation of surface-freezing extended to the trunk of the body, and my thoughts grew less connected, changing frequently from subject to subject, and narrowing down to my own sufferings. I noticed, furthermore, that the half-breed spoke more frequently than before, and shook me occasionally. Still I had no thought of danger, and even laughed at Mr. Wheeler exclaiming, "Men, men, I believe I am freezing to death!"

However, during this whole period of two hours or more I could not prevent a continual shivering and shaking. I endeavored several times to control my nerves and remain quietly in one position, but without avail. At the end of that time I noticed that I was becoming quieter; but, while physically so, my mind was suffering more. My whole idea was to get warm. My body was cold all over—frozen in, I felt, to an equal depth in every place. I clung closer to my companion in the vain hope of producing more warmth. Oh, if I could only get warm again! I felt that I could willingly barter every earthly possession to be warm. I thought bitterly of our culpable carelessness in not building a fire the evening previous, and of the joy it would be to sit before such blazing fires as we had on nights now gone. If I could only get warm again! Was there not some way in which we could get to a fire? Could not the half-breed build one? If

he would only try, I would give him anything; nothing was too dear if I could only feel warm. There was a particular room in my brother's house, with a large open fireplace in it. If it were only evening, and we were gathered about a bright, cheerful fire, how nice and warm I could get! One sometimes goes into an hotel sitting-room in winter, and they have a huge box-stove, made to take in cord-wood whole. What a genial warmth and heat there is! What a glow there is over the entire room! Oh, if I could only get warm like that!

I would be aroused at times out of thoughts like these by my companion, who now took to pushing me, and constantly warning me against falling asleep. Mr. Wheeler, also, was continually talking of his freezing, and assured us both that his ears were already frozen.

For the first time I really became conscious of the danger we were in. Strange to say, it had no effect upon me. I felt no alarm at the possibility of being overtaken by death, I was so cold—if I could only get warm again! This was the burden of my thought. Yet I was fully conscious of the danger. I knew, if death overtook me, in exactly what shape it would come. And I knew, furthermore, that I had already passed through the first stage, and was nearly through the second. Still, with this well-defined knowledge of what was before me, I was totally indifferent to the pangs of death. I only wanted to be warm; I felt that in some way I must get warm. I thought over the prospect of a speedy death indifferently. There was no trouble about the future at all—I did not think

of it. The physical suffering and stupor were too great to admit of it.

Twice before in my life I had been in momentary expectation of death; and one experience of the horrors of dissolution was the same as this. That was a case of *dangue* fever. While perfectly conscious in the last moments—told they were my last, and asked if I was prepared to undergo them—I felt the same sensation as here; if I were only comfortable, I would willingly go. I knew a gentleman once who told me that, when in a similar situation—on the point of death—his only feeling was one of hunger; no thought or fear for the future at all, if only his appetite could be satisfied. But how different that other experience, when called upon to face death in full bodily vigor! The terrors which encompassed me are indescribable.

Continuing in the consciousness of danger, and yet thinking only of my suffering and desire to become warm, after the lapse of an hour, probably, I began to get warm—that is, the sensation was one of warmth and comfort, but was in reality, a species of numbness. I felt my flesh in several places, and it produced a prickly, numb feeling, similar to that experienced when a limb is asleep. I was comfortable and happy, because I was warm, and grew indignant with my companion for his unwearied thumps on my body, and the continual answers he required to his questions; I wanted to be let alone. Fully conscious that, if I went to sleep I would never awaken again, I was perfectly willing to go asleep. Even then I remember thinking of poor

travelers, lost in the snow, being brought in by St. Bernard dogs.

But I was warm, and laughed silently at Mr. Wheeler's complaints of freezing. I paid no further attention to the shakings of my companion or his questions, but gathered myself up, and lay thinking how comfortable I was. Pretty soon I began to doze, then to awaken suddenly, when I received a more severe blow than usual. Then I awoke to see the half-breed sitting up and bending eagerly over my face, and hear a few muttered words to Wheeler—and then a sense of comfort and oblivion.

Now I was dead. Sensibility had left me. It was evident that I would suffer no more. In thirty or forty minutes, an hour at farthest, my body would die. Then what?

That I should awaken with a bright fire before me, and be wrapped in robes and blankets, seemed the most natural thing in the world to me. For the matter of that, it appeared to me that when I had fallen asleep I had anticipated just such a consummation of things, and it was fully half an hour before I began in the least to comprehend that any thing out of the ordinary channel had occurred. True, I knew in a vague and indistinct way that the half-breed was talking of Mr. Wheeler being lost, but the matter seemed to be no affair of mine, and created no surprise. I looked at him chafing my arms and legs, and simply felt that it was quite right and natural that it should be so.

Gradually, however, I regained consciousness sufficiently to understand that, finding me fast freezing, and impossible to

arouse, he had gone, at the imminent risk of his own life, some three hundred yards farther down the stream, and, finding a dry and partially rotten log, had built a fire; had then returned to find me totally unconscious, and to carry me, robes and all, to the fire. The few words he had addressed to Mr. Wheeler before leaving me showed that he, too, was fast lapsing into the same state, and, when I was carried in safety to the fire, had returned to find Mr. Wheeler gone—having, evidently, awakened from his stupor sufficiently to realize that he was alone, and to wander off, half frenzied, in search of us.

These facts being at last impressed upon my mind by the excited and voluble half-breed, I urged him to renew the seach for our lost companion; but he positively refused. He explained that, in doing what he had already done, he had jeopardized his own life, and had frozen both hands and feet considerably; that, while paid to care for me, he had nothing to do with Mr. Wheeler. He urged that, if he left the bank of the stream, he was likely to be lost, the snow at once obliterating all trace of his tracks. I ordered him to go, begged him to go, but without avail. An offer of five golden sovereigns met with a like refusal. At length, I told him that, if he would find Mr. Wheeler, dead or alive, I would give him a good horse. For this consideration he went. In twenty minutes he returned, leading the unfortunate man, badly frozen, whom he had found running wildly about in a circle on the prairie. He was kept from the fire with some difficulty, until his hands, feet, and face, were thawed out with water, but

did not recover his mind until six hours after. From frequent personal observation, I am led to believe that nearly every one who freezes to death upon the prairies, or elsewhere, becomes insane before death.*

Having been thoroughly warmed and recruited by a steaming-hot breakfast, we followed the river to avoid losing our way, and in the afternoon reached a Hudson's Bay Company's post. Here we were informed that the temperature had fallen, during the previous night, to forty-five degrees below zero! We remained in that hospitable shelter for two days, during which the terrific storm raged with unabated fury. Some dozen Indians and half-breeds perished upon the route over which we had just passed.

After this lapse of time, I recall my thoughts and feelings with much more distinctness and accuracy than I could for some time immediately subsequent to the events related. No one who has passed through great danger realizes fully the extent of it at once. It requires time to impress the memory with all its circumstances. What my feelings were at this unexpected preservation from the dreadful fate which threatened me, it is impossible to express.

* I have had five cases of freezing to death brought under my personal observation. In every instance the subject gave indubitable indications of insanity before death, and in every case exhibited it in the same way—by casting off his clothing and wandering away from it. One subject was entirely nude, and distant fully a mile from the last article of clothing he had discarded.

CHAPTER XIV.

A HALF-BREED BALL.

BEING invited to attend a ball at the residence of M. Pierrette Pirouette, in the parish of St. François Xavier, given in honor of the betrothal of his daughter Pauline, I am anxiously expectant of its delights for the intervenient three days.

I draw a mental picture of the daughter Pauline, by surmounting the customary attire of the country with a softened shade of her progenitors' features, and inserting an additional intensity into the blackness of her eye. I conceive, furthermore, the *fiancé* of the now matrimonially moribund maiden, in black corduroys, moccasins, and sky-blue capote. His features are clearly cut in the aboriginal mould, and he smokes perennial *harouge* in a pipe with a china bowl. I also portray, in my mental picture-gallery, the manner of their courtship, in which the fond maiden, whose brothers are given to the chase, succumbs to deeds of desperate daring performed on the hunting-field by the youth of her choice, who is likewise nomadic in his habits.

In anticipation, I depict the contents of my friend Pierrette's larder; and, reveling upon the marrow-fat of the bison, and the nose of the moose, perform gastronomic feats upon the basted ribs of the antelope, worthy of a Patagonian.

I even mentally congratulate the blushing Pauline upon the discrimination displayed in her choice, and am repaid by thanks expressed in a composition of four languages. I also express my sense of approval to the bridegroom expectant, and am at once invited to imbibe. In effect, I am afflicted with a species of mental phantasmagoria until the eventful day arrives, and brings reality in the shape of the dog-sledge with its attendant driver, which is to convey me over the twenty-four miles of prairie intervening between my residence and the scene of festivities.

I place the archives of the consulate, committed to my care by a confiding Government, under the guardianship of an intelligent half-breed; who, not knowing the difference between a certified invoice and a passport, is more than likely to describe the first comer in want of a copy of the latter as a *carcajou*.

As affairs of this description, in this northern climate, are likely to continue for the space of three or more days, it behooves to make preparations commensurate with the duration of my stay; and I accordingly place a small quantity of "renewed woolen" in a receptacle borrowed for that purpose. I dress in the habiliments of rejoicing usually worn upon occasions of this nature, and find myself encased in a fine-cloth capote of cerulean hue, and ornamented with brass buttons; black-cloth trousers, supported by a variegated sash, the fringed ends of which hang about the knees in a bewildering manner.

Being unable to control the canine specimens attached to

my sledge with any degree of satisfaction to myself, I surrender all authority in that matter to the copper-visaged driver of dogs running at my side. I find, at the outset, considerable difficulty in retaining an equilibrium, owing to the peculiar structure of the sledge, and the constant lurching from side to side which it affects; and am, on one or two occasions, precipitated into snow-banks from which, such is the internal arrangement of the sledge, I am unable to extricate myself, and am, in consequence, dragged along face downward, until the driver restores me to a perpendicular position.

During the progress of the drive I observe that my attendant appears intimately acquainted with every passer-by, and invariably addresses each as his brother. I am at a loss to discover the necessity of so general a recognition of relationship, until I ascertain it to be the current coin of courtesy in his grade of society. My attendant has, furthermore, a playful manner of addressing his dogs in relays of profanity, discreetly veiled by being delivered in the heathen tongues; and, entertaining a special hatred of his wheel-dog, he flicks him constantly with the sharp thongs of his whip. There is, also, an implicit faith on his part in my ability to understand the dialects of the Six Nations, and he addresses me, from time to time, in any one which his fancy may dictate.

I become gradually more accustomed to the motion of the sledge, but am still possessed with a vague sense of insecurity, until the half-breed seizes the rope at the end of the conveyance, which he uses as a rudder. I am next seized with the idea that my attendant—who is running at the rate of six

miles an hour, in his efforts to keep up with the dogs—not being endowed with the constitution of a government mule, may by some possibility become short of wind, and leave me to accomplish the remainder of the distance alone; but am soon reassured by the sublimated state which his profanity attains.

On reaching the house, I am discharged from the sledge by some occult process known to the driver, and experience the sensation of having been packed away in a case, and taken suddenly out to be aired.

The yard surrounding the house, and the reception-room, are already crowded by my host's relatives and invited friends, who are walking promiscuously about, and talking in an hilarious manner. When my benumbed limbs have become sufficiently supple to effect an entrance, I am at once surrounded by the guests, who give expression to their delight in a variety of ways, and conduct me to an adjoining chamber, beseeching me to enter and disrobe, and be refreshed. Encompassed as I am, it is no easy matter to reach the apartment, where I find my host, surrounded by discarded raiment and bottles, standing in state.

After the first greetings are over, and I have swallowed the fiery compound provided for the inner man, I pause to take a mental note of the surroundings. I observe that my host appears already in some measure overcome by the labors of reception, and is arrayed in garments of a bewildering variety of color, his hair ornamented by one solitary feather. My host's relatives are making themselves useful as far as lies

in their power, and are endeavoring to renew their exhausted energies by frequently bearing away the empty bottles into an adjoining room to be refilled. I remark that all the apartments are thick with smoke. There is a continuous series of applications to a box, placed upon a chair, containing a mixture of cut tobacco and the bark of the grey willow, and the odor arising therefrom is of an extremely pungent and aromatic nature. Of furniture in the house there is none worth mentioning; furniture in this latitude being represented by a few stools, deal tables, and wooden trunks. I note that the female portion of the assembly are distributed about in positions of charming freedom; some sitting on the laps of the male guests, others surrounding the male necks with their arms, and yet others laughing and chatting with a sweet, inconstant air among themselves.

I remark that the guests, of both sexes, are of varied shades of color, from the clear, deep copper, to the delicate blond, but that all possess the same unvarying black hair and eyes. Furthermore, the language spoken is polyglot, being an admixture of French, English, and several Indian dialects. Well as I am acquainted with myself, I am amazed at the consummate hypocrisy I display in assuming an intimate acquaintance with them all, when my rascally driver has given it out as an indisputable fact.

At this point I become conscious that the bewitching Pauline, fairest of maidens, is regarding me with a fixed stare. At my request, her venerated progenitor presents me, when she kisses me upon the cheek. Being reminded of biblical as

well as French custom on this point, I at once turn the other cheek, which she salutes in a like manner. As I do not observe that she blushes, or that her father objects, I conclude it to be one of the customs of the country, and am inwardly rejoiced at the bliss which is yet in store.

Mademoiselle Pauline introduces me to her betrothed, a dark youth, with the straight features of the aboriginal, who seems rather overcome with his felicity, and talks feelingly to me of *sa petite Pauline*, and, on my congratulations, overwhelms me with proffers of service.

I note that the conviviality of the guests is only interrupted by the accession of a new arrival; that the females smile sweetly upon him, and the men play about him in a boisterous manner. The new arrival is surrounded as I have been, and conducted into the chamber of robes and refreshments, where his conductors join him in festive libations to his health. This excites a spirit of emulation among the guests, and each arrival is accompanied by an increased number of ushers, who strive to do him honor. It is further productive of an excited and affectionate state of feeling; the females are hugged more frequently and thoroughly, and certain exuberant spirits betray an inclination to cut pigeon-wings without a musical accompaniment.

The betrothed of Pauline comes to me, and talks earnestly and incoherently of *son ange de son cœur*, and clings to my buttons with charming familiarity.

I am inducted by the gushing Pauline into the depths of the back-kitchen, to pay my respects to her mother, with

whom I have a previous acquaintance. She receives me with cordiality, and embraces me with a knife and fork in her hands, which endanger the safety of my visual organs to an alarming extent. I am, however, appeased by an osculatory performance on both cheeks, which would have been infinitely more agreeable coming from her daughter. I am assured of the excellence of the repast to be served, by the delicious odor arising from the kettles, and from the numerous spits turning slowly before the huge fireplace, and of its prospective extent, by the joints of bison, and the multiplicity of smaller game displayed upon the dresser.

I am reminded of there being "a time to dance," by the gathering of the guests in the apartments devoted to that exercise, and by the tuning up of a mangy and enervated violin, which produces a sensation on the tympanum not unlike the filing of a saw. The musician, too, seems to suffer from a chronic attack of St. Vitus's dance, confined to the head, and thumps monotonously upon the floor, with moccasined feet, keeping time to his music.

A festively-attired youth, with intensely Indian features, proceeds to call off the measures of the dance, in a corruption of the musical language of *la belle France*. The dances do not partake of the nature of the dreamy waltz, or the mild mazourka, but rather of the wild eccentricities of the jig and physical labor of the reel. The volatile half-breed requires something vigorous and exciting in his amusements. The disciples of Terpsichore, male and female, take positions upon the floor, and, after a preliminary courtesy, start off in the

jig; the remainder of the guests looking on with admiring eyes. After a few minutes, a young man jigs across the floor, and usurps the place of the first performer, and the female is shortly relieved by another of her sex, who is soon superseded by yet another. So it continues, until all the company have taken turns upon the floor. I am matriculating for a stoic, yet confess to irreverent laughter at the trembling forms of the dancers, who perform with a nervous energy and excitement that is indescribable.

At times there is an evident desire exhibited by the favorite performers to test the capacity of their legs and the soundness of their wind, by earnest efforts to dance each other down. On these occasions the audience become intensely sympathetic, and encourage their favorite champion by words of superlative endearment. I hear my neighbor apostrophizing the lady thus: "Oh, my little dear! what legs you have got! You are entirely too much for that little frog! When you are done, you shall have a drink, my daughter! Ah, holy Moses, what power! what endurance! You could outrun the deer, *mon mignon!* Well, will you win, *ma bichette?* *Sacre!* you are down, eh!"

Then come the reels, performed by six or eight dancers, who circle about in an energetic way, and, when exhausted, retire and give place to others. There is no cessation, save when the artist, wielding the instrument of Paganini, signifies to the parched condition of his throat by becoming slower in his touch.

As the dance continues, the excitement grows more in-

tense, and the civilized and heathen dialects are more inextricably mixed up. The performers are unwearied in their efforts, and, when forced to retire from the field, are covered with perspiration. I am convinced of the democratic nature of the assembly, by seeing my uncivilized driver of dogs embraced in the number of the dancers. But it is becoming infectious.

I am seized with a desire to join in the Terpsichorean maze, and, finding Pauline, I plunge into the intricacies of a reel. I am no match, however, for that matrimonially-inclined young woman, and, after a few turns, find myself swinging off at a tangent, like the loose finger of a compass. I am alarmed at the complicated machinery I have set going, but am, ere long, swung off to a wooden chest by the excited Pauline, who exhibits some inclination to encamp on my knees. That being a weak point in my anatomy, I forego the pleasure by sliding quickly to the end of the box, upon which the enthusiastic maiden sits down solidly.

I discover that the gyrations of the dance have produced a dizziness about the head, and a nausèa in the stomach, to which I am unaccustomed. As it increases, I "swear off" dancing, and devote my talents to observation and pleasant chats with my friend Pierrette. Employed in this manner, I fail for some time to note the greasy mouths and fingers of many of the guests. When I do so, and the consciousness dawns upon me that these are certain indications of supper, I at once retire to the depths, registering a vow to partake of every dish upon the table.

I am assured that the engaged Pauline, and her fair sisters, do not feed alone upon ambrosia, from witnessing their prowess with knife and fork at table. What the delicate sex of civilization would think of such an exhibition of carnivorous appetite, is beyond my penetration. The viands consist wholly of meats, flanked by wheaten cakes, baked in the ashes.

My *vis-a-vis* announces the termination of his meal, by asking the maiden whom he attends whether she is full (!) She replies that she is full. Imitating their example, I return to the ballroom in a gorged and semi-dormant condition.

The dance still continues with unabated vigor, although now well toward morning. I note, however, the mysterious disappearance, from time to time, of the dancers, who reappear at unexpected intervals with a certain frouzy air, which, nevertheless, quickly disappears under the excitement of the dance. Impelled by curiosity, I pursue a retreating form, and am led to a distant part of the mansion, where I find, stretched out upon the floor, the recumbent forms of the missing guests. From time to time, as many as are requisite to keep up the festivities, are awakened ; and, being forthwith revived with raw spirits, join in the dance with renewed vigor. Passing another apartment, I catch a glimpse of the female guests enjoying a similar *siesta*, and thus learn how the affair is continued for so long a period.

. . . . . .

On arising in the morning, I am astonished to find the dancers of the previous night replaced by an entirely new set,

of more mature age and aspect, who have dropped in to bear the burden of the festivities during the day. On the approach of night again, however, the former set resume their places, and thus it continues for a number of days.

After three days, I make my adieus to the pleasant family, and am whirled back to civilization by my demoralized driver of dogs, fully satisfied with my experience of a half-breed Indian ball.

CHAPTER XV.

A WOOD-"INDIAN" TRADE.

FROM the latter part of October, when the hunters and trappers take advances for the winter's hunt, to the latter part of March, when the season's catch of fur begins slowly to come in, but few indications of life are visible about the isolated trading-posts of the company scattered throughout the Fur Land. Through the deep snow, drifted within the stockades in fantastic outlines, narrow paths are cut. Occasionally a shivering figure hurries from one building to another, but for the most part they are deserted ; and, except for the light smoke curling from the chimney-tops, one might fancy the small collection of houses but a series of snow-drifts, shaped by the shifting winds into a weird but transient likeness to human habitation. As the spring approaches, however, the hibernal torpor which has influenced a large portion of the trading population, gives way to the active life generated by the vigorous prosecution of the fur-trade.

Toward the latter end of March, or the beginning of April, the Indian trappers leave their hunting-grounds, and make a journey to the fort with the produce of their winter's toil. Here they come, marching through the forest, a motley throng ; not men only, but women and children and dogs, of

all ages and condition; each dragging sleds, or hand-tobogans, bearing the precious freight of fur to the trading-post. The braves march in front, too proud and too lazy to carry anything but their guns, and not always doing even that. After them come the squaws, bending under loads, driving dogs, or hauling hand-sleds laden with meat, furs, tanned deer-skins, and infants. The puppy dog and the inevitable baby never fail in Indian lodge or *cortege*. The cheering spectacle of the two, packed together on the back of a woman, is not of infrequent occurrence; for in the Fur Land wretched woman often bears man's burden of toil as well as her own. The unwilling dog also becomes a victim, and degenerates into a beast of burden, either drawing a sledge, or a loaded travaille.

Fifty or one hundred miles away from the nearest fort the minks and martens of the Indian trappers have been captured. Half-a-dozen families have, perhaps, wintered together, and they all set out for the fort in company. The dogs and women are heavily laden, and the march through the melting snow is slow and toilsome. All the household goods have to be taken along. The black and battered kettles, the leather lodge, the axe, the papoose strapped in its moss-bag, the two puppy dogs not yet able to care for themselves, the snowshoes for hunting, the rush mats, the dried meat; all together it makes a big load, and squaw and dog toil along with difficulty under it. Day after day the mongrel party journeys on, until the post is reached. Then comes the trade.

The trapping or wood-Indian not being considered a dangerous customer, the gates of the post are freely thrown open to him. Accompanied by his female following, bearing the burden of fur, he marches boldly into the trading-room. Here the trader receives him, and proceeds at once to separate his furs into lots, placing the standard valuation upon each pile.

The company has one fixed, invariable price for all goods in each district, and there is no deviation from the schedule. Any Indian to whom particular favor is meant receives a suitable present, but neither gets more for his furs, nor pays less for his supplies, than the tariff directs. In the southern portion of the territory, which forms the great battle-ground between the company and free-traders, the Indians receive many presents to keep them true to their allegiance. Especially is this true with the most expert trappers, who often get articles to the value of fifty or sixty skins (upwards of $35 in value), and the ordinary hunters receive large presents also. In the North, however, where the company is all-powerful, and rules its subjects with a mild and equitable sway, presents are only made in exceptional cases. The company reserve a very narrow margin of profit, so narrow, indeed, that on certain staple articles there is an absolute loss. In the Missouri country, some years ago, when several rival companies existed, the selling price of goods, as compared to their cost price, was about six times greater than that fixed by the Hudson's Bay Company's general tariff.

And yet their total profits are so enormous that it has been deemed advisable, from time to time, to hide the truth by

nominal additions to the capital stock. Of two hundred and sixty-eight proprietors there were, in July, 1858, one hundred and ninety-six who had purchased at two hundred and twenty to two hundred and forty per cent. In the hostilities between the French and English from 1682 to 1688 they lost £118,014, yet in 1864 a dividend of fifty per centum, and in 1869 one of twenty-five per centum, were paid. The capture of fortresses by the French at intervals between 1662 and 1697 cost them £97,000. Yet soon after the peace of Utrecht they had trebled their capital, with a call of only ten per centum on the stockholders. No wonder that in those days, and for long after, a Hudson's Bay share was never long in the market.

For a very evident reason—that of the goose and golden eggs—the price paid for furs is not in strict accordance with their intrinsic value. If it was, all the valuable fur-bearing animals would soon become extinct, as no Indian would bother himself to trap a cheap fur when a high-priced one remained alive. The hunter may possibly, in the remote northern regions, have to pay five silver-fox skins for his pair of three-point blankets, worth there about fifteen dollars, the value of the skins paid representing two hundred dollars; but he can, if he likes, buy the same article by paying for it in muskrat red-fox, or skunk-skins of inferior worth. In the early days of the trade, before the facilities for transportation were as perfect as now, the price of merchandise far exceeded that of the present time.

We have been credibly informed that when Fort Dunve-

gan, on Peace River, near the Rocky Mountains, was first established, the regular price of a trade-musket was Rocky Mountain sables piled up on each side of it until they were level with the muzzle. The sables were worth in England at least fifteen dollars apiece, and the musket cost in all not more than five dollars. The price of a six-shilling blanket was in a like manner thirteen beavers of the best quality, and twenty of a less excellent description. At that time beaver were worth eight dollars a pound, and a good beaver would weigh from one to one and three-quarter pounds. Gradually the Indians began to know better the value of a musket and of their furs, and to object most decidedly to the one being piled alongside the other, which, report goes, was lengthened every year by two inches. Finally a pestilent fellow discovered silk as a substitute for the napping of beaver hats, and that branch of the trade declined.

Lest an erroneous impression of the profit made on the trade-musket by the company may be gained, however, it may be well to state that because the flint-gun and the sable possess so widely different values in the world's markets, it does not necessarily follow that they should also possess the same relative values in the Fur Land. Seven years often elapse after the trade-musket leaves the company's warehouses in London before it returns to the same place in the shape of sable. It leaves England in the company's ship in June, and for one year lies within the walls of York Factory, on Hudson's Bay; one year later it reaches Red River; twelve months later again it reaches Fort Simpson, on the Mackenzie River;

there it is turned into sable within the year, and returns to London in three years, following the same route over which it came. That old rough flint-gun, whose bent barrel the Indian hunter will often straighten between the limbs of a tree or in the cleft of a rock, has been made precious by the long labor of many men; by the trackless wastes through which it has been carried; by the winter famine of those persons who have to sell it; and by the years which elapse between its departure from the workshop, and the return of the skin of sable or silver-fox for which it was bartered.

It is a mistake also to suppose that spirits are supplied in large quantities from the company's stores. In the Northern districts spirits are not allowed to enter the country; and in no case are they a medium of traffic for furs; though in the Southern districts rum is sometimes exchanged for provisions when they cannot be got on other terms. It is only when the Indian is in communication with free-traders that he becomes a regular drunkard; those who deal with the company confining themselves, or rather being confined, to a small quantity twice a year; the first when they receive their supplies before the hunting season, the second when they return with the product of the chase. Even this custom obtains only with the Plain-Indians, and is being gradually abolished.

The trader, having separated the furs, and valued each at the standard valuation, now adds the amount together and informs the Indian—who has been a deeply interested spectator of all this strange procedure—that he has got sixty or seventy "skins." At the same time he hands his customer

sixty or seventy little bits of wood, to represent the number of skins; so that the latter may know, by returning these in payment of the goods for which he really barters his furs, how fast his funds decrease.

The first act of the Indian is to cancel the debt of last year. This is for advances made him at the beginning of the season; for the company generally issue to the Indians such goods as they need, up to a certain amount, when the summer supplies arrive at the forts, such advances to be returned in furs at the end of the season.

After that he looks round upon the bales of cloth, guns, blankets, knives, beads, ribbons, etc., which constitute the staples of the trade, and after a long while, concludes to have a small white capote. The trader tells him the price, but he has a great deal of difficulty in understanding that eight or ten skins only equal one capote. He believes in the single standard of values—one skin for one capote. If an Indian were to bring in a hundred skins of different sorts, or all alike, he would trade off every one separately, and insist on payment for each, as he sold it. It is a curious and interesting sight to watch him selecting from the stores articles that he may require, as he disposes of skin after skin. If he has only a small number, he walks into the shop with his blanket about him, and not a skin visible. After some preliminary skirmishing he produces one from under his blanket, trades it, taking in exchange what he absolutely needs; then he stops. Just as one thinks the trading is over, he produces another peltry from beneath his blanket, and buys something else.

Thus he goes on until, having bought all the necessaries he requires, he branches off into the purchase of luxuries—candy, fancy neckties, etc. Under so slow a process an Indian trader needs to possess more than average patience.

When the little white capote has been handed the Indian, the trader tells him the price is ten skins. The purchaser hands back ten little pieces of wood, then looks about for something else; his squaw standing at his elbow, and suggesting such things as they need. Everything is carefully examined, and with each purchase the contest over the apparent inequality between the amount received for that given is renewed. With him, one skin should pay for one article of merchandise, no matter what the value of the latter. And he insists also upon selecting the skin. Like his savage brethren of the prairies, too, he has never solved the conundrum of the steelyard and weighing-balance—he does not understand what "medicine" that is. That his tea and sugar should be balanced against a bit of iron conveys no idea of the relative values of peltries and merchandise to him. He insists upon making the balance swing even between the trader's goods and his own furs, until a new light is thrown upon the question of steelyards and scales by the acceptance of his proposition. Then, when he finds his fine furs balanced against heavy blankets and balls, he concludes to abide by the old method of letting the white trader decide the weight in his own way; for it is clear that the steelyard is a very great medicine, which no brave can understand, and which can only be manipulated by a white medicine-man.

The white medicine-man was, in the fur-trade of fifty years ago, a terrible demon in the eyes of the Indian. His power was unlimited, and reached far out upon the plains. He possessed medicines of the very highest order: his heart could sing, demons sprang from the light of his candle, and he had a little box stronger than the strongest Indian. When the savage Plain tribes proved refractory around the company's trading-posts, the trader in charge would wind up his music-box, get his magic lantern ready, and take out his galvanic battery. Placing the handle of the latter instrument in the grasp of some stalwart chief, he would administer a terrific shock to his person, and warn him that far out upon the plains he could inflict the same medicine upon him. If the doughty chieftain proved penitent and tractable thereafter, the spring of the music-box, concealed under his coat, would be touched, and, lo! the heart of the white trader would sing with the strength of his love for the Indian. "Look," he would say, "how my heart beats for you!" and the bewildered savage would stalk away in doubt of his own identity. If the red-man made medicine to his Manitou, and danced before all his gods, the white medicine-man would paint gibbering demons on the skins of his lodge, and send fiery goblins riding through the midnight air, until, in sheer terror, the superstitious savage hid his painted face in the dank grasses of the prairie.

When the Indian trapper has paid his debt and purchased all needful supplies, if he has any skins remaining, he turns his attention to the luxuries of life. The luxuries of life with

this painted child of the forest and stream consist of fancy neckties, colored beads, cotton handkerchiefs, red and yellow ochre, and cheap and tawdry jewelry. For articles such as these he hands over his remaining chips, amid childlike manifestations of delight on the part of his expectant squaw. Then he turns his attention to the last, and, to him, most important feature of the trade—that of getting into debt again; for a great majority of the Indian and half-breed trappers and hunters really live in a state of serfdom, or peonage, to the company. Indeed, it may be said that every man, woman and child living in the Fur Land contributes to the revenue of that corporation; and also that the company feeds, clothes, and wholly maintains nine-tenths of the entire population; nearly all classes being more or less engaged in the fur-trade, and bartering their produce at the many posts scattered over the country. Like the Mexican or Brazilian peon, the Indian trapper is so constantly, and, for him, largely in debt to the fur-trade, as to be practically its servant. Twice during the year, perhaps, he is free from debt and his own master; but such freedom is only of momentary duration, continuing but for such time as he can get into debt again. In fact, the trapper seems ill at ease when free from pecuniary obligation, and plunges into it with a facility and to an extent only limited by his ability to contract it. By this system of advances the company rules its vast territories, and is as much a monarch of the frozen latitudes as Crusoe was monarch of his island. The continuance of this system has been caused by the necessities of the hunters and trappers; and by the fact that the company, like the wise corporation

that it is, does not kill the goose that lays the golden eggs, but carefully cares for the game and the hunters on its vast preserves.

Contrary to the general rule in civilized life, a debt is seldom lost, except in the event of the death of the trapper. He may change his place of abode hundreds of miles, but he still has only a company's post at which to trade; and it is impossible for him so to conceal his identity as not to be found out sooner or later. But the trapper seldom attempts to evade the payment of his debts; he is not yet civilized to that degree which practices rehypothecation. The company has always been a good friend to him and his, supplied his necessities, ministered to his wants, and he pays when he can. He knows that when he liquidates his old debt, he can contract a new one just as big. He knows, too, that when the company promise him anything he will get it; and that he will always pay just so much for his goods and no more. No attempt was ever made to cheat him, and there never will be. When he is ill, he goes to the nearest fort and is cared for and attended until he recovers. When he does his duty well, he gets a present; and he never performs any labor for his employers without receiving a fair compensation. Such humane treatment binds the Indian and half-breed to the company in a bond that is not easily broken. So, when he has spent all his little pieces of wood, and asks for further advances, he is allowed to draw any reasonable amount. Carefully looking over the purchases already made, counting up his supply of ammunition, clothing, gew-gaws,

etc., he concludes to take more tea and tobacco; for the trapper is a very Asiatic in his love of soothing stimulants.

The consumption of tea in the Fur Land is enormous, the annual importation for one department alone (the Northern) amounting to over one hundred and fifty thousand pounds. The tea used is nearly all of the black varieties, and commands a price ranging from two to three shillings sterling per pound. In every half-breed's hut and Indian lodge the tea-kettle is always boiling. Unlike the Asiatic, who drinks his tea from a glass tumbler, with sugar and a slice of lemon to give it flavor, the native of the Fur Land takes his Confucian beverage undiluted from any vessel that may come handiest; though preferring the black and battered cup in which it has been brewed. He likes it, too, as near the boiling point as can be reached, and as strong as can be made; though he will take it at any temperature, and of any degree of strength, rather than not get it at all. He drinks enormous quantities of it at his meals, until, like Mr. Weller's girl, he swells visibly before your very eyes; gets up in the night, time after time, and drinks it cold; carries it with him in his weary journeys over the plains, and halts at every available pine thicket to build a fire and put his kettle on. Meet a party of Wood-Indians anywhere, and after the handshake and inevitable "How!" comes the mystic word "the." A very little suffices to make them happy, and wrapping it carefully in their blankets, they run to the nearest timber and start a fire. When the half-breed buys tea at the trading-store, he never permits the officious clerk to wrap it in paper,

but purchases a new handkerchief, or a square of white cotton, to put it in. He cherishes a vague and misty idea that brown paper absorbs the aroma of his tea, and lessens its strength. Besides, the cotton handkerchief becomes aromatic from its savory contents, and consequently more valuable.

Nearly on a par with the consumption of tea in the country ranks that of tobacco. The company's annual importation for the Northern department alone amounts to over seventy-five thousand pounds. It comes, for the most part, in the shape of manufactured plugs—small black "tens," composed of equal parts of molasses, tobacco, copperas, and other ingredients—for the aboriginal and his blood relations, and the large, flat, natural-leaf cavendish for the whites. The amount of smoking going on seems at first incredible to the newcomer. Everybody "puffs a cloud," and goes prepared with all the paraphernalia of a smoker. The native carries a fire-bag—a long leather bag, containing pipe, tobacco, knife, flint and steel, and *harouge*, the inner bark of the grey willow. He mixes an equal quantity of the Indian weed with the willow-bark, and smokes it from choice and economy. The compound has a rather pungent, aromatic odor, not unlike that produced by smoking cascarilla bark. The Indians also mingle with their tobacco an equal amount of a small species of sage, common on the prairie, in lieu of the willow-bark. Its continued use, however, is productive of certain irritable diseases of the throat and cellular tissues of the lungs, and finally of consumption. The dry, hacking cough, common among Indians, is said to be one of the primary results of its use.

The purchase of such soothing solace terminates the trade of the Indian trapper. After going in debt to the extent of his ability, he wends his way to the forest again. The furs he has traded are thrown carelessly behind the counter, to be afterward carried to the fur-room.

A FIRE-BAG.

In the early spring, when the snow is gone from the plains, and the ice has left the rivers, the workmen at the trading-post begin to pack all the fur skins in bales of from eighty to one hundred pounds each, that being the usual weight of each package—goods or furs—in the company's trade. The outer covering is buffalo-skin, or raw-hide; loops are made to each package in order to sling it on the pack-saddles, if the pack is sent from an inland post; the pack-saddles are repaired and thongs cut to fasten the bales on to the horses. The company's horses—of which each fort has its complement—that have wintered in some sheltered valley, under the care of Indians, are now brought to the post; the packs are tied on, and the train starts for the depot or chief fort of the district, situated always on the banks of some navigable stream. This is calling fitting out a brigade, and forms the grand event of fort life—being looked forward to by the men as a boy anticipates his holidays. Arrived at the depot, the bales are handed over, and goods for the ensuing year received in return.

It generally occurs that several brigades meet at the depot simultaneously. In this event the spectacle presented is quaint and singular: the wild looks, long unkempt hair, sunburnt faces and leather costumes of the traders being only exceeded by the still wilder appearance and absence of clothing among their Indian attendants. So long as the brigades remain the scene is one continuous festivity, eating, drinking and quarreling. When the brigades depart, the furs are all sorted and repacked, and pressed into bales by an enormous lever—rum and tobacco being placed between the layers of skins to keep out the insects and moths. They are then shipped by slow stages to the nearest seaport, and eventually sold at public auction in London. It is estimated that the total worth of the furs collected by the Hudson's Bay Company alone since its organization represents a money value of $120,000,000 in gold. Still, strange to say, owing to the careful preservation of game by the company, the average yearly catch is not sensibly decreasing.

It may not be uninteresting in this connection to give a brief sketch of the various furs traded by the company, and the average number of each species annually exported from its territories.*

The first in point of value is the pine marten, or Hudson's Bay sable, of which about 120,000 skins, on an average, are exported every year. The martens or sables from this region are not considered so valuable furs as the sables of Russia,

* For many of the statistics which follow the author is indebted to an article on "American Furs," by J. K. Lord, F. Z. S., in the *Leisure Hour*.

although there is no doubt that the varieties are in reality one and the same species; the difference in temperature, and other local causes, readily accounting for the better quality of the Russian fur. In fact the difference between the two is not always discernible, the lighter-colored skins being usually dyed and sold as Russian sable. The winter fur is the most valuable, and the Indian trappers say the first fall of rain, after the snow disappears, spoils the marten. When caught the animal is skinned like a rabbit, the peltry being inverted as it is removed, then drawn over a flat board, and dried in the sun. The animals haunt the pine forests, especially where fallen or dead timber abounds, and are mostly caught in the style of trap known as the dead-fall. A good marten skin is worth in trade from two and a half to three dollars. The best skins come from the far North, being darker and finer furred than others.

The fisher is much like the pine marten, but larger. Just why he is called a fisher we cannot imagine, as he does not catch fish, or go near the water except when compelled to swim a stream. He climbs readily, but is trapped like the marten. The tail is very long and bushy, and at one time a large trade was carried on in them, only the tails being worn by the Polish Jew merchants. About twelve thousand are annually exported from the territory. The average trade price is from two and a half to three dollars. The fisher in full winter coat makes a finer suit of furs than the sable.

The mink is vastly inferior to either fisher or marten in the quality of fur, and its habits are entirely different. It

frequents streams and water-courses, and feeds upon fish, crabs, etc. The Indian hunter catches it with a steel trap, baited generally with fish. The trade price is about fifty cents a skin. About 250,000 skins are exported, the majority of which ultimately go to the continent of Europe.

The raccoon is widely scattered over the territories of the company, about 520,000 skins being purchased and exported every year. The raccoons are generally shot, but a few are taken in steel traps. The fur is not very valuable, being principally used in making carriage-rugs and in lining inferior cloaks and coats.

The most valuable fur traded by the company is that of the black and silver foxes. There are three species of fox found in the territory—the black or cross, the silver and the red fox. The two former are considered to be only varieties of the latter; as in any large collection of skins every intermediate tint of color, changing by regular gradations from the red into the cross and from the cross into the silver and black, may be found, rendering it difficult even for the trader to decide to which of the varieties a skin really belongs. The Indians also assert that cubs of the three varieties are constantly seen in the same litter. The silver and cross fox skins bring from $40 to $50 each; the red fox is only worth about five to eight shillings. About 50,000 red foxes, 4,500 cross, and 1,000 silver are annually exported. The silver fox fur is almost entirely sold to Chinese and Russian dealers.

To illustrate the difference in the trade in beaver now as compared with what it was before the introduction of silk in

the napping of hats, we may mention that in 1743 the company sold in England 26,750 skins, and more than 127,000 were exported and sold at Rochelle, in France. In 1788 Canada alone supplied 176,000, and in 1808 again 126,927 skins. About 60,000 are now brought annually from the company's territories. So much was this fur in demand before the introduction of silk and rabbits' fur that the poor little rodent in some districts is entirely exterminated. The principal use made of the fur now is in the manufacture of bonnets in France, and in making cloaks. The long hair is pulled out, and the under fur shaved down close and even by a machine; some of it is still felted into a kind of cloth. The beaver is a very difficult animal to trap, but is, nevertheless, rapidly disappearing from the great fur preserves of the North.

The musk-rat is similar in many of its habits to the beaver. Indeed, some of the species build their houses precisely as the beaver does. The hunters generally spear them through the walls and roofs of their dwellings. The annual destruction of these little animals, though immense, many hundreds of thousands being yearly exported, does not serve greatly to diminish their numbers. The fur is of very little value, being used in the coarsest manufactures. Large bundles of the tails of the musk-rat are constantly exposed for sale in the bazaars of Constantinople as articles for perfuming clothing.

The lynx or wildcat is found in considerable numbers throughout the territory. Its fur, however, though prettily marked, is not of much value. Of wolf skins about fifteen thousand are annually exported, and of the land otter about

seventeen thousand skins are often procured. The fur of the sea otter, though the most valuable fur traded, is very difficult to obtain. The animal ranges along the seacoast between California and Alaska, and appears to be a connecting link between the true seal and the land otter. It is generally caught in nets or speared by the Indians in the sea. Nearly all the sea-otter fur goes to China, and a good skin is worth about $200.

The coarse fur of the wolverine or American glutton is used mostly in the manufacture of muffs and linings, and is of comparatively little value. Only a small exportation—about twelve hundred skins yearly—is made by the company. Some years ago the caprices of fashion introduced the fur of the skunk into popular use, and for a few seasons the traffic in that odorous peltry was enormous. Now, however, its use is almost wholly abandoned, and only about a thousand skins are yearly collected. The Indians generally shoot the skunk, and always skin it under water.

The skin of the bear—black, brown, and grizzly—is always in demand, and is used for innumerable purposes. The number of bears killed annually is not easily determined, but, at a safe average, it may be estimated at 9,000. The greater part are killed in winter, during their period of hibernation. An immense business is also carried on in rabbit fur. Besides the hundreds of thousands of rabbit skins exported by the company, there are sold annually in London about 1,300,000 skins which are used in the fur trade. The natives of the territory manufacture large quantities of these skins into

bed-quilts, the pelts being cut into strips and braided into thick braids, which are then sewed together and covered with cloth, making a quilt unsurpassed for warmth.

An immense annual export, which cannot properly come under the head of fur, is made by the company in the shape of buffalo robes. In the autumn of 1870 the line of forts along the Saskatchewan River, in the Plain country, had traded 30,000 robes before the first of January; and for every one traded fully as many more in the shape of skins of parchment had been purchased, or consumed in the thousand wants of savage life. The number of buffaloes annually killed in the territory seems incredible; 12,000 are said to fall by the Blackfeet alone. It is only during a part of the winter that the coat is "prime," as the phrase is. Before the first of November the hair is not long enough to make a marketable robe. After the middle of January it gets ragged, and its rich black-brown is bleached by the weather to the color of dirty tow, especially along the animal's back. During the summer months the hair is very short, and frequently rubbed entirely off in many places, from the animal's habit of wallowing in the mud. The robe of commerce is generally taken from cows, and sometimes from young bulls, but never from old bulls, whose hides are much too thick and heavy. In the winter months the latter are covered all over with thick, long and curly fur; a mane of light-brown hair and fur, like that of a lion, only larger, envelopes his neck; a long glossy dewlap, hanging from his chin like a deep fringe, sweeps the ground; which, with his savage-looking muzzle,

and prominent black eyes flashing between the tangled locks of his hair, give him altogether a most ferocious appearance. In reality, however, he is a very timid animal, and it is only when he imagines himself unable to escape that he becomes desperate, and therefore dangerous from his immense strength.

We have been struck more than once with the resemblance of old bulls to lions, as we have seen them standing apart on the low ridges and sandy knolls, eying one from afar with an air of savage watchfulness—each neck crested with a luxuriant mane, swelled into greater largeness by the hump beneath it, each short, tufted tail held straight out from the body in bold and lion-like defiance. The full grown bull is immensely shaggy, especially about the head, which is covered with so vast a quantity of fur, wool and long hair hanging down over its eyes, and almost concealing the horns, as to give it the appearance of being nearly one-third the size of the whole body. Such an outline, seen relieved against the night sky, as one lies in cheerless bivouac upon the plains, is not calculated to inspire a feeling of safety.

Most buffalo robes are found to have been split down the middle and sewed up again, the object of the process being to lighten the labor of dressing the skin. The Indian women dress all the robes, and few of them are able to prepare a complete hide without assistance. Some Indians, when asked why they have married more than one wife, will answer that each wife requires another to help her in dressing robes; and the more wives one possesses the more skins he is able to bring to market

The hides are brought in from the hunt just as they are taken from the animals, and given to the women, who stretch them upon a rude framework of poles and flesh them with iron or bone scrapers. They are then slowly dried, and during this process various things are applied to render them pliable.

The final work is painting the inside with pigments, a labor bestowed only upon unusually fine skins. We have seen some robes thus ornamented that were beautiful specimens of Indian decorative art. The designs used in most instances are of the calendar style. The intention seems to be to keep a record of certain years on the buffalo robe by some symbol representing an event that took place in that year. The events selected are not always the most important of the year, but such as were, in some sense, the most striking, and could be best represented by symbols. For example, stars falling from the top to the bottom of the robe represent the year 1833, an event from which the Indians frequently count. The etching of an Indian with a broken leg and a horn on his head stands for a year in which Mr. Hay-waujina, One Horn, had his leg "killed," and so on. The symbols are placed in a spiral form, beginning in the centre, and going a little to the left; the line then turns on itself to the right and below, and so on, turning with the sun. These designs are copied many times, of course, so that in a pack of painted robes, nine-tenths of them will be decorated in exactly the same manner.

The work of dressing a buffalo skin perfectly is a very

tedious process, and one squaw is only considered capable of preparing ten robes for market during the year. To the savage with any sort of an eye to business, this fact alone would be a sufficient incentive to polygamy on the most extended scale.

The best robes are always reserved by the Indians and half-breeds for their own use, and some of them are marvels of beauty and finish. We have seen buffalo skins tanned to a degree of softness that would rival the finest cloths. The trader, for the most part, gets only second-rate robes and the refuse of the hunt. The Indian loves the buffalo, and delights in ornamenting his beautiful skin. The animal is his only friend, and small wonder he calls it so. It supplies every want from infancy to old age; wrapped in his buffalo robe, the red man waits for the coming dawn.

The catalogue of quadrupeds in the company's territory embraces ninety-four different animals; but we have noticed the principal ones to whose fur the corporation confines its trade. There is a small traffic done in the robes of the musk-ox, and the furs of the ermine, siffloe, fitch, squirrel and chinchilla, but it is insignificant compared to the staples of the trade.

THE END.

Digitized with financial assistance from the
Government of Maharashtra
on 18 July, 2018